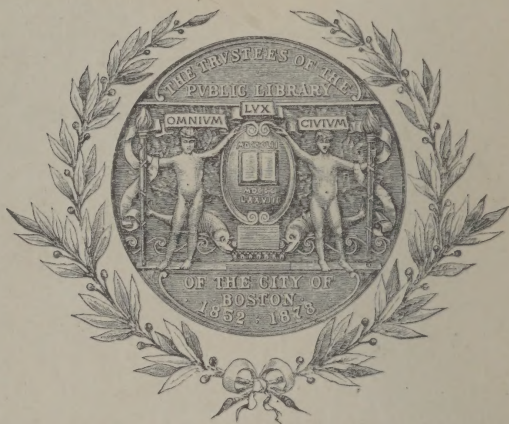




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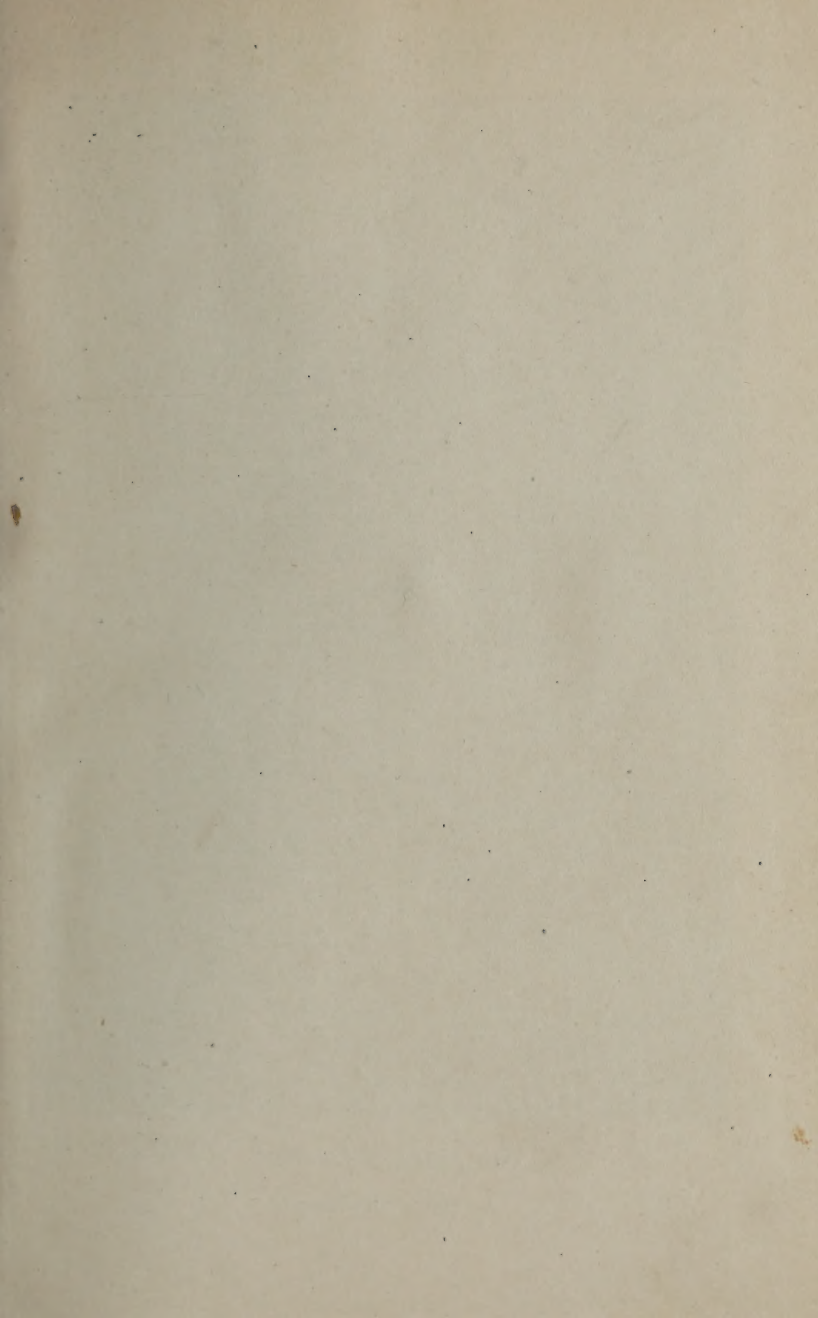
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GERALDINE FARRAR

AS TOSCA IN "TOSCA"

# THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA AND CONCERT SINGER

BY

FREDERICK H. MARTENS



ILLUSTRATED

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## INTRODUCTION

The one great rule for achievement in any art is as valid to-day as it has been in the past: learn from the greatest exponents of that art. *The Art of the Prima Donna and Concert Singer* should make it possible for every girl and woman student of singing to apply the rule in question. Here the greatest singers of our age have placed at the student's disposal the results of their actual technical and artistic experience. In a direct, informal manner Geraldine Farrar, Maria Jeritza, Galli-Curci, Schumann Heink, etc., tell what they did to achieve their abiding success on the operatic and concert stage. Each explains her processes of practical vocal training and artistic study; each discloses the secrets of the work which has made her name a musical household word.

Their advice covers the details of preparation both for the operatic and the concert stage, and in each case does so *from the standpoint of individual development*.

Speaking as they do, from the *educational* point of view, their counsels may be said to stand for the quintessence of the "how" of artistic and

## INTRODUCTION

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practical vocal achievement, an achievement justified by universal recognition, their counsel should be invaluable to every serious woman student of the art of song.)

To place at the disposal of the vocal student the priceless lessons of the success of the greatest among the singers, is the end and aim of this book. And in furtherance of that aim we will now let these illustrious teachers speak for themselves.

FREDERICK H. MARTENS

## FOREWORD

Every ambitious student of singing has one or both of two goals in view: the opera and the concert stage. And invaluable to those who would succeed in these fields are the thousand-and-one practical hints, details and suggestions which no singing method contains, which only those who have reached the heights of vocal achievement are qualified to give out of their own experience. These the present volume endeavors to present.

Twenty artists whose laurels in opera and recital are green discuss *The Art of the Prima Donna and Concert Singer*, from every possible angle, in heart-to-heart talks. They give their personal views and reactions, based on their own study and experience. They consider technique and interpretation, the practical points of difference between singing in opera and in concert, the use of the mirror and costume, the opera aria in the concert program, the way to prepare a new rôle or song, daily vocal exercise, and a hundred-and-one other phases of their art.

In easy, conversational fashion they present



## FOREWORD

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the lessons of experience which has led them to the summits of vocal success; lessons of constructive advice, whose value, so conclusively demonstrated by those who give them, need not be emphasized. In each singer's article some outstanding section or feature has determined the title—yet a number of additional subjects are also considered.

The volume may be commended to the general reader as well as the professional student. Speaking with conversational freedom, the artists represented have often drawn on anecdote to illustrate their points; they have touched on the human as well as on the more purely technical facets of their art; they have given an idea of what the life of the *prima donna* really is.

The writer, who has presented their ideas, cannot help but feel that a debt of gratitude is due these great artists. They have fully and freely made the lessons of their own experience available for every American girl who studies singing: they have generously placed at their disposal the knowledge tested and approved in practice. And it has been their hope, individually expressed, that what they themselves have learned while traveling the road to success may be of benefit to those who wish to emulate them.

FREDERICK H. MARTENS

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**THE ART OF THE  
PRIMA DONNA  
AND CONCERT SINGER**





# THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA AND CONCERT SINGER

## LUCREZIA BORI

THE large, comfortable study in the New York home of Lucrezia Bori, the famous *prima donna lirica*, whose art as a singing actress as well as a singer is one of the delights of the Metropolitan, does not overlook the blue, white and golden-tiled domes and towers and groves of orange, lemon and mulberry trees which are typical features of Valencia, her Spanish "home town." There is nothing architecturally Moorish or romantic in a New York Cityscape. Yet, within this great study room, with its open grand piano, its pictures, books, and inviting chairs and divans, the singer has created an atmosphere of artistic individuality and charm. And this was

## THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA

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heightened by the manner in which Miss Bori—with something of the ingenuous grace which marks her portrayal of the Goosegirl in “Die Königskinder”—expressed her willingness to discuss some phases of her art for the benefit of those who might wish to emulate it.

“When did I begin to study singing? Well, as a child, I was always singing, and I still remember my first public appearance at the age of six. It was during the Spanish-American War and I sang Arditì’s waltz song, ‘Il Bacio,’ at a benefit concert given in Valencia for the wounded Spanish soldiers. But it was not until I was fourteen years old that I began to study seriously at the Valencia Conservatory, where there were good teachers and the instruction was along approved Italian lines. I went through the regular curriculum of *vocalises*, Concone, Marchesi and others and remember, in particular, some excellent vocal exercises by Rossini which we studied there.

“I was a girl of sixteen when I went to Milan—went to Italy to study voice with a Spanish teacher, Melchior Vidal, a tenor who had sung



LUCREZIA BORI





## LUCREZIA BORI

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with Patti, and was himself a pupil of Lombardo. With him I studied for six years, working hard, and later did some studying in Rome. No, I do not believe the best teacher can supply what the singer herself must have—the voice. He can modify or improve whatever voice the pupil may possess; he can build up, can add to the register, can file and polish, can minimize weaknesses and emphasize advantages. But there is a certain point beyond which he cannot go. It seems to me that he is like the diamond cutter: he can make a diamond show to the very best advantage by the way he cuts and facets it, but he cannot change its color. Too many students expect their teachers to supply them not only with a voice, but with a brain as well.

### VOCAL STUDY

“It is hard to lay down any fixed rules for vocal study, especially in the case of the operatic student. I believe in hard work, but not in overwork. Mental study, mental work is the most important. When I am preparing a rôle or a recital program I study one hour, study hard

## THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA

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mentally alone, and another hour with my accompanist. And, of course, aside from the intensive study of a song or rôle in which all the shades and nuances of interpretation are fixed and developed, I give time to those purely mechanical exercises which keep the voice flexible and in good singing trim—scales, arpeggios, tied notes, *legato* and *staccato* passages and so forth. You know when my voice came back to me after I had practically lost its use, it came altogether—all of a sudden—there it was! I had rested a good deal and felt in the best of condition, physically, and after working for two weeks, singing exercises and studies, I found that my voice had regained all its customary flexibility and smoothness. During the opera season I never practice more than half an hour a day, that is to say, at home. For with the rehearsals and the actual singing of the rôles I have enough to keep mind and throat busy.”

### DISCOUNTING THE MIRROR

Most of us visualize the *prima donna*, when she passes from the purely musical to the scenic

## LUCREZIA BORI

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study of her rôle, as standing before her mirror, and by the aid of that faithful and unprejudiced guide, developing her various poses and gestures, and all those passing shades of facial expression which are in keeping with the changing emotions of the heroine. We take for granted that the airs and graces which play their part in a dramatic and convincing portrayal of an operatic character come to us by way of the looking-glass.

"I never use the mirror in preparing a rôle," said Miss Bori, "and, in fact, I have never studied the dramatics of the operatic stage in a routine way. Naturally, I study my characters, try to feel myself into their personality; but whatever other scenic action there may be, whatever there is in the way of gesture and pose I feel is something which ought to develop spontaneously out of my understanding of the rôle itself. When I am on the stage I am, for the time being, Manon or Ah-Joe, Lucinda or Michaela, as the case may be. What they do on the stage must be a translation of what they feel, of the emotions which move them, of the passions or compulsions which drive them.

# THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA

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## ESTABLISHING THE ATMOSPHERE OF A RÔLE

“First of all, one must be at home in the epoch of the opera, study the libretto and other books which may throw a light on its atmosphere”—the writer could not help wondering whether the small, beautifully bound copy of the Abbé Prevost’s “*Manon Lescaut*,” printed in Amsterdam in 1788, which lay on a near-by table, had helped in the preparation of a rôle in which the speaker had won such triumphs. “One must enter completely into the spirit of the work, feel the romance of one’s own rôle and react to it. Then comes the music. There is really no danger in forgetting the mirror altogether in preparing my rôle with respect to its acting, for I know that in the rehearsals, when I have identified myself with the particular rôle I am to sing, the bodily interpretation, facial expression and movements of hands and arms will develop themselves quite unconsciously as I drop into my part—for then I am, for the time being, no longer Lucrezia Bori, but Norina, or Nedda, Fiora or Sniegurotchka. So I can honestly say I do not be-



## LUCREZIA BORI

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lieve in 'studying' dramatic art in the generally accepted sense for opera. I have never studied dramatic art in that way.

"I do not coach with any one—I establish the spirit, the feeling, the interpretation of my rôles myself, and indicate them for my accompanist. Of course, there are times when, in acquiring a rôle, I have to learn to do something which I have never done before. I know when I first sang *Carmen* I had never smoked a cigarette. Oh, I know that a good many people think that smoking a cigarette ought to be almost second nature to a Spanish lady, but in reality it is not so! Spanish ladies do not smoke. ) I had never smoked a cigarette before, and the first one!" Miss Bori made a wry face and shuddered gracefully to express her disgust. "After that, however, I had no difficulty, and got so that I could take a puff and let the smoke float up to the drops with the greatest nonchalance.

### LYRIC SOPRANO AND COLORATURA ROLES

"I have a repertory of twenty-seven rôles in all that I sing and am ready to sing at any time

## THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA

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—but there are others which, perhaps, I have sung only once or twice and which I may never sing again. Such, for instance, as the soprano rôle in a Spanish opera, ‘Sogno d’Alma,’ by Lope Ferhado, a big lyric rôle, which I created with Bonci at the Buenos Aires’ Colon Theater. As a rule, lyric soprano rôles cannot well be changed into coloratura ones; but there are some which are common property for sopranos of both types. I think Traviata should be preferably a lyric rôle, that is what it is meant to be, but it can be changed into a coloratura rôle by adding notes and embellishments which Verdi did not put in his score. And the same applies to the rôle of Gilda in ‘Rigoletto.’ True lyric rôles like that of Michaela cannot be changed into coloratura ones. That is a rôle of which I have always been particularly fond, because I made my *début* in Rome in it and scored a great success. This summer during my vacation I expect to study the leading soprano part in Vittalini’s ‘Anima Allegra,’ Italian music written to a Spanish comedy. You ask me about Fiora, in Montemezzi’s ‘Tre Re’? Well, it is a rôle which I adore, because it is

## LUCREZIA BORI

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so dramatic, so passionate; it is a rôle in which the singer can lose herself entirely in the character portrayed; and is one every lyric soprano should study. Before I was to create the rôle in New York, I had studied it in Italy, and when it was to be given in the town of Cesena I had decided to go and hear it, in order to gather some impressions of it at first hand, and see how some one else would sing my part. I had already worked out my own interpretation, but when Toscanini heard I was going he insisted that I give up the idea. 'It will be very badly done,' said he, 'and instead of giving you some good ideas, a performance of that kind might easily influence your own working-out of the part and injure it.' So I gave up the idea. Last year I met Montemezzi in Italy and—though he had never heard me sing *Fiora* on the stage—he told me I was the best interpreter of the part he had ever heard. You see, I sang portions of it for him while he accompanied me at the piano. But the compliment was one which I treasured, for I know he meant what he said, and, after all, the

## THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA

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composer of a work should be a good judge of its interpretation.

### THE STUDENT SHOULD NOT CULTIVATE A "FAVORITE" RÔLE

"No, I have no favorite rôles. And the ambitious opera student will do well not to cultivate 'favorite' rôles in her work. There is always the danger, if you think that you like one or two special rôles better than any others, of narrowing down your interests to certain types of operatic interpretation. And the genuine opera singer should be able to take any rôle which falls within her special range and vocal gift and make it absolutely her own. She must cultivate versatility and the ability to enter convincingly into the feelings and emotions of a number of different characters. And this she cannot do nearly so well if she decides to have 'favorite' rôles. I like my last rôle the best because it is the one which holds my interest most firmly at the time. Mimi, with the delightful waltz song—it has a little coloratura, not much—I always enjoy; Butterfly, Nedda, the two Manons, Massenet's and Puc-



## LUCREZIA BORI

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cini's; Margaret in Boito's 'Mefistofile'; Lucinda, in Wolf-Ferrari's 'L'Amore Medico'—there are so many wonderful lyric soprano rôles, all of them beautiful, satisfying musically and dramatically, giving the singer such opportunities for expressing a wide range of different emotions that I do not see how she can select just one in preference to all the others. No, my advice to the student would be to make every rôle she studies her 'favorite' rôle while she is studying and singing it: she will be surprised how this mental attitude will improve and broaden her actual work. Some of the modern rôles offer very distinct problems. There is Ottavio in Richard Strauss' 'Rosenkavalier'; the music of this part is not so hard to sing, but it lacks the clarity and evenness of melodic line which we find in Mozart, for instance. It is tricky rhythmically, the supporting harmonies are very complex and the sonorities not at all Italian. And yet it is a fascinating rôle both to study and to sing, because it is full of effect, and one has the stimulation of real difficulties to overcome.

# THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA

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## COSTUME

“Costume plays a most important part in the proper presentation of an operatic character on the stage. It is one of the most powerful agents in lending a touch of the real and actual to the illusory and fantastic art of the opera. It helps more than anything else to make the unreal appear real. The dress of a bygone time or period, if naturally worn, plays a great part in making the period itself seem natural. I always pay great attention to the details of costume, and I think that no opera student should neglect them. When I prepare a new rôle, a tenth-century one like *Fiora*, an eighteenth-century one like *Manon*, or one which, like *Sniegurotchka*, is placed in some primitive epoch of tribal life, I study the dress, the manners and customs of that time, I examine engravings and pictures, I visit the libraries, until I have a clear idea of what a woman such as I am presenting might have worn. But of course, what might satisfy an archæologist”—Miss Bori smiled—“might not do for a woman of taste and a metropolitan opera audi-

## LUCREZIA BORI

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ence. After I have my ground plans, my definite information, I build my costumes upon them, with a liberal allowance of good taste and feeling for what is suited to my own individuality. In Paris I have two genuine artists in costume who help me design my operatic costumes (colored drawings are first made); Pepe Pena, who is with Doucet, and Alice Bernard, who is independently established. They are real artists and their work could hardly be improved upon.

### OPERA VERSUS RECITAL SINGING

“Why should not the opera singer sing in recital? On the operatic stage one must deploy a big voice; on the recital stage it is simply a matter of adapting one’s vocal resources to a smaller stage and, usually, a smaller auditorium. A good opera singer should be a good concert singer, and there is no reason why this cannot be the case. Besides, there is a great artistic pleasure in concert singing. It is delightful to sing recitals in group costumes appropriate to the groups presented. I have been very successful in recitals of this kind; for instance, a group of

## THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA

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Venetian folk songs, I sing in sixteenth-century Venetian costume; a group of old English songs in dresses copied from the Reynolds portraits; French songs of the period in the crinolines of 1836; and a set of four Spanish songs in costumes adapted from Goya paintings. I include only a single operatic aria on a recital program—either something by Mozart or a modern number.

### WHAT IS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS

“What the opera singer needs to achieve success? Well, there are many things, it seems to me. Beauty is not absolutely necessary—I know that because I am not beautiful—but charm, which is so much more important, there must be. And then, of course, a voice and good nature, and good health, and heaven only knows how many other qualities besides! I think that, perhaps, it might all be reduced to a simple formula: To achieve success the opera singer must have a good voice, talent and—the ability to use both to the best advantage!”







## SOPHIE BRASLAU

SOPHIE BRASLAU is one of the few dramatic contraltos who have proven conclusively that art rather than register is the first factor in achieving wide and justified success on the concert stage and in opera. She is a shining example of the fact that the personality of the singer and the quality of her work establish her fame; that the soprano voice is not necessarily a more "popular" one than the alto; that it is the range of a singer's art rather than the range of her notes which commands appreciation. Not that this means that Miss Braslau's range is limited, either, for it covers three octaves and more. In the music room of her New York home Sophie Braslau expressed constructive ideas regarding her art which bear the indorsement of her own great success for students desirous of emulating her example.

# THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA

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## POINTS THE AMBITIOUS STUDENT SHOULD CONSIDER

“Success in opera or concert?” said Miss Braslau. “The girl who wants to make a name for herself in opera or recital should bear in mind the fact that, in the long run, her voice, her natural vocal equipment, represents only about fifty per cent of the sum total of essentials needed. An individuality which compels, a mentality capable of absorbing the inwardness of the thought she has to project, plus great musical intelligence are as important as the voice itself. It is true that some who have reached the heights in opera or concert are more proficient vocally than mentally; yet analysis would show that in such cases some outstanding individual characteristic was the corner stone of their success. And this, after all, proves that individuality and not voice alone must be taken into account.

“Every young singer should know herself. But she should not look into the mirror of introspection from the angle which will reflect her as she wishes to be, but face to face, to realize what

she really is. And if honest self-examination shows her that she is unjustified in cherishing operatic or recital ambitions, then she had better give them up before she enters on a long road of disappointment and disillusionment. Quite aside from her voice, the young girl who wants to become a *prima donna* must have an inborn sense of the dramatic, a feeling for theatrical values. Besides what may be taught by way of acting, she must have a natural feeling for appropriate gesture, how to walk and move about the stage, how to project her personality instinctively.

“And a sense for the dramatic is just as necessary on the concert platform; more so, perhaps. There the sense of dramatic values must be keyed up to a higher pitch; it demands finer quality, because the gesture and movement which is natural in opera would seem exaggerated in concert. [The singer stands alone, on the bare stage, and she must create her dramatic effects through sheer power of mind in presenting her music, through absolute artistic concentration.] Too many singers on the concert stage merely sing.

## THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA

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Fate in casting the die has given them a voice lovely enough to hide otherwise obvious defects, and accidental circumstances may have helped to establish their fame. But such singers might be called freaks of chance. The really great singer must have the finer and more distinctive personality which dominates the concert stage, and whose vivid and compelling art makes the lack of action, costume and theatrical decoration seem negligible.

### HINTS DRAWN FROM A DUAL CAREER

“I grew up vocally, so to speak, in opera. I began with parts no more than two or three measures long and, like most young opera aspirants, was very impatient to sing the big rôles at once. Yet, as I grew gradually into star rôles, I saw that Mr. Gatti-Casazza, who had held me back in what I sometimes used to think a very over-cautious way, had been entirely right. He had my very best interests at heart, and did not want me ‘to start something I could not finish,’ to use a slang expression. I am glad now that at a time when I was very eager to be tried out in



## SOPHIE BRASLAU

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the rôle of Amneris, Gatti-Casazza would not allow it—I was not ready.

“And I am glad I turned my attention largely to my concert work when I did, because I have grown to love it, and at the same time know that I shall return to opera—yes, I may do so next year—all the better equipped when I do.

“The dramatic soprano and coloratura? Well, the contralto’s position as regards coloratura is much the same as that of the dramatic soprano. I can see no reason why the dramatic contralto, if her voice be properly trained, should not sing coloratura passages with flexibility. Brilliancy is another matter, of course. But even the lyric soprano, as a rule, sings soprano coloratura passages—if called upon to do so—with flexibility rather than brilliancy, for brilliant coloratura is distinctly a soprano possession.

### THE CONTRALTO RÔLES IN OPERA

“It cannot be denied that some of the contralto characters in opera are unpleasant types. But I do not think that they are unsympathetic to an opera audience. I believe that what an opera

## THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA

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audience wants is not sympathetic characters so much as real vocal and dramatic art, powerfully projected. If a contralto has a glorious voice, and her tones ring out through a crowded house; if the emotions of hatred, revenge or despair which she expresses thrill, the audience will respond and she will make a lasting impression. I remember when I was a little girl I heard Schumann Heink as Ortrud. She was dressed in black, her acting was superb, and the hatred in her voice so true, she so completely dominated the scene that she held me spellbound. I was actually so frightened that I hid my face in my mother's skirt. But her glorious tones, her vivid art, are something I have never forgotten. To me she has always been an ideal singer. Recently when a critic called me the Schumann Heink of my generation I felt I had been paid the greatest possible compliment. Her voice has the dramatic quality comparatively rare in the contralto, and to think I shared such a possession with her was pleasant to learn.

"A good range, of course, is quite as necessary for concert singing as for opera; more, in fact,

for in opera the orchestra often helps out the voice. I have three octaves, from A below the F of the bass clef to the high C. In 'Trovatore' I can sing Azucena's cadenza in Act Two with ease. The development of my register is really entirely due to Sibella, whom I consider a wonderful singing teacher. He has coached and taught me on the theory that my voice was one of a peculiar, older type—the Alboni type of voice, with its equalized register—now practically extinct, Schumann Heink being, perhaps, the only one of the school remaining.

### THE DRAMATICS OF THE CONCERT STAGE

"On the concert stage each song may be said to have its own dramatic scheme, musically and in projection. Unwavering sincerity and a knowledge of what you are doing every minute you sing are essential to project your song properly. At the same time you must be able to convey and establish an impression of absolute abandon, if necessary. For the moment you must become wholly and entirely that which you sing—the mood, the emotion, the character.

## THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA

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“In a strict sense I do not consider gesture legitimate on the concert stage, save, perhaps, in the case of the *diseuse*, like Yvette Guilbert, where gesture forms an integral part of a definite art type, and has to be used. Chaliapin, to my mind, is the outstanding example of correct gesture on the concert platform. He can run the gamut of expression with a minimum of bodily movement, and display the greatest art in facial inflection. The real *Lieder* singer should give her audience drama, not in movements of the body and arms, but in the inflections of her voice and changes of facial expression. The entire body may express feeling and mood with but slight movement. A relaxed pose, coördinated with voice and features, may convey a strong impression of languor or resignation. Passion and ardor speak in a tensing of the body muscles. A proud and confident raising and throwing back of the head makes a mood of triumph and ecstasy unmistakable. By the slightest expenditure of natural movement many moods may be established, and this simplicity of motion is the keynote of them all. In opera even, excess of move-

ment often tends to weaken the impression the singer wishes to make. I think John Barrymore is one of the best models for the opera singer, whether professional or student, as regards the dramatic factor. To see him in *Hamlet*, for instance, is an object lesson in the art of listening without movement, yet always making you feel that his whole attention is concentrated, that he is drinking in every word he hears, that his attitude is not a quiescent but a dynamic one.

### TRADITION AND TEMPO

"I am no great believer in tradition. Every true artist, I think, establishes her own tradition; she does things in the manner best suited to her own artistic character and personality. In music the absolute values of time and tempo, expressed as the composer wished them to be expressed, are my bases of interpretation. Why imitate a conception, even if artistic, because it is 'traditional,' because some other artist may have expressed it in that way? The poem originally inspired the song; the composer has set down the exact time values of his notes which in-



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interpret it. I use the metronome when I am studying a song, and it might be well if it were more largely used by the student. It enables you to establish what should be the first interpretative consideration, the tempo, the time of the musical mood. After that, the melodic line or design may be given the individual color you wish to give it, without doing violence to the composer's thought.

"I never realized the importance of the absolute time value of notes until I sang with Toscanini at the Metropolitan. He was very meticulous, and with him a dotted quarter was a dotted quarter, neither more nor less. He might, if music and situation justified it, allow a singer to rest on a high note; but he never broke the rhythm, never did violence to the rhythmic values of a vocal phrase. I learned to sing in time from him.

"No artist should have to shift and change her tempos to carry out her interpretation. And the singer should be able to play the piano. I began to study it at six and continued for years. Abil-

ity to play the piano is far more than an accomplishment for the singer.

“As for tradition, take the ‘Erlking,’ for instance! How can there be such a thing as a ‘traditional’ interpretation? The singer either has her own individual conception of the poem and projects its music accordingly, or she has not.

Clinging to tradition often means an artistic tragedy for the artist. The artist should be allowed to follow her own instinct in interpreting. She should never pause here or there, *ritard* or *accelerate*, sing *forte* or *piano* at certain measures, because some one else in the past has done so. If she is an artist, she will have her own individual way of expressing the music she sings. In opera, also, I think too much stress is often laid on tradition; Aïda must cross the stage at a certain given moment, presumably because all the Aïdas since the Suez Canal was opened have done so. Carmen must go through certain conventional movements at certain times, because other Carmens have done so, and so on.

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## VOCAL STUDY

"These things cannot be taught. They must come from out yourself. [I should say, speaking from eight years of hard work, that you learn all the details of the stage (opera or concert) only through your own experience.] There is no other way. For the professional artist the hardest study years begin when she first faces the public. And she must honestly love that public, love to sing for it, if she wants to be loved in return. [Only a few artists on the concert stage have conquered this entire, loyal affection, and among them I think Alma Gluck is one of the foremost.

"I always do a certain amount of technical work while on tour, about half an hour a day, to keep 'tuned up' so to say. I usually begin with exercises combining two notes, then three, four, five and six, going on to scales in sustained tones. Each day I use exercises of a different type and kind, and work them out. It is to Sibella that I am indebted for the realization of what positive vocal technic and true vocal flexibility really

mean. Before I went to him I used to read about old Italian *bel canto* singing; he showed me what it actually should be.

“In general, I believe the vocal student spends too little time in preparation. The desire to ‘rush into’ things, to sing before one can sing is too prevalent. It prevents concentration. So much may be done with the mind. I concentrate on my songs and study them mentally to a great extent, thus saving my voice for actual concert work. I do not indulge largely in vacations. This summer past I took two lessons a day, week in, week out, because I am interested in my work. When I am not on tour I practice from one to two hours a day, with pauses for rest between times.

### THE CONCERT PROGRAM

“As a result of feeling the pulse of my audiences, I have adopted an elastic program framework of four groups. And I sing whatever pleases me—if I like a song I sing it. As regards music I am an absolute *eclectic*, and program whatever seems to me worth while. But

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I never classify audiences and try to make up programs for people of certain sections or parts of the country. I regard this as a great mistake. The people who form my audience in Coffeerville, Kansas, do not want to feel that the artist who sings Moussorgsky in New York will pick out something gentler, sweeter or more obvious, thinking 'they would understand it better.' Audiences do not want to be sung down to. They are entitled to the best I have to give.

"My first group includes old classic arias, such as the Bassani 'Cantata,' but never an opera aria. I do not think the opera aria belongs on the concert program. As an encore? Yes: I always sing something from 'Carmen,' my 'Eli, Eli!,' and Stultz' old ballad, 'The Sweetest Story Ever Told.' But I never program the opera air or the ballad.

"Though my second group usually consists of Russian songs, I have a wide choice and can vary it considerably. I sing Moussorgsky, Rachmaninoff—he accompanied me at a concert in New York once, the only singer he has accompanied in the United States, an honor of which I



am proud, for he is a great artist—Arensky, Gretchaninoff and others. Then I sing the old Hebrew temple melodies. I sometimes drop this group and substitute German *Lieder*: Schubert, Schumann or Wolf.

“My third group contains modern French or Italian songs, together with English songs. There is such a thing as giving an audience too many songs in foreign languages, and I like to sing as many songs as possible in English. Two foreign groups and two almost English groups offer a fair balance. Some of the Wolf and Mahler songs I always do in English; people prefer them in that language. Yet I would not dream of doing the ‘Erlking’ in any language save German.

#### THE ACCOMPANIMENT IN THE SONG RECITAL

“I think critics are all too apt to dismiss the work of the accompanist at the song recital with a stereotyped line at the end of their review; something to the effect that the accompanist was ‘competent.’ Of course, the accompanist is not sup-

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posed to project personality. The accompanist is a background. A musical background, however, is very important in making a song stand out. It is like the scenery in a dramatic production. The accompanist's technic and touch supply color, and no fine accompanist should be summarily dismissed with a brief mention. This is another tradition which should be broken. I need sing a song only once for Mrs. Ethel Cave Cole, who is my accompanist, for her to grasp my interpretation. She is, in my opinion, one of the best accompanists to be found, and her musical intelligence and grasp of ensemble is quite beyond praise.

### EXTERNAL AIDS TO THE VOICE

"No, I never use anything for my voice. In fact, I never give it a thought except when I am singing. As for catching cold, I never worry about it. I never eat lozenges, never use the atomizer, never gargle. I try not to overtire myself, and believe that a care-free mind is one of the best practical means of voice preservation.

"I do devote considerable attention to my face

and to bodily exercise—daily dozens, massage, etc. But this is merely part of a balanced physical routine. I never let little things worry me. Though an only child I was brought up with a rod of iron, with the result that I have a hardy constitution and am not as spoiled as only children often are. I am a ‘fresh air fiend,’ and like to walk miles at a time. And I must have my hot bath, followed by an ice-cold shower; every morning. Cleanliness and fresh air, keeping in good physical condition, I find, does away with all need of using palliatives and tonics.”

### WHAT UNDERLIES ART IN SONG

At this juncture, to console the writer for the fact that she was not going to say much more, Miss Braslau offered him a cigarette and then, with an air of finality, brought a very interesting interview to an end. Said she: “I think that perhaps the most important thing for every ambitious vocal student to remember is that underlying all great art in song is the widest possible knowledge of other things besides music. The broader her cultural outlook, the greater her men-

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tal development, the wider her circle of human and intellectual interests, the better she will sing, for she will not sing as a specialist."

It might be added that Miss Braslau herself is one of the most striking instances now before the public of the exemplification of this theory.







EMMA CALVÉ

AS CARMEN IN "CARMEN"

## EMMA CALVÉ

EMMA CALVÉ, the great dramatic soprano, whose recent book, *My Life*, offers so fascinating a record of her career, is an artist willing to place some of the rich treasure of her experience at the service of the serious student. During a pleasant morning hour in the Hotel Savoy, before the daily rehearsal for her concert tour, she talked with freedom and vivacity on various phases of her art from the standpoint of those who wish to make a success of singing in opera or concert. Probably the most famous among all the famous Carmens, her supremacy in this rôle has a tendency to cast in the shade her accomplishment in others. Her superb voice and dramatic interpretation have lent distinction to the parts of the three Marguerites (Berlioz', Boitos' and Gounod's), of Ophelia, Messaline, Hérodiade, Sappho, Lakmé, Pamina and numerous other operatic rôles of the dramatic soprano, and her successful concert tours have

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established her fame in this newer field. One of the very greatest singers of the age, she has drawn upon both her study and her teaching experience for the benefit of the reader.

### PLAIN CHANT FOR VOICE PLACING

“When I was a young girl,” said Madame Calvé, “we had an old music master in the convent in which I was brought up, who taught me piano and *sofège*. There I sang the old religious music of the Church, the canticles, the plain chant, and I do not think there is any better music to make the voice develop in a natural manner than this old religious music. It seems to place the voice naturally. I know I never had any difficulties of voice placing; I never had to work for it, and I believe it was because I sang so much of this music when a child. In the Midi, the south of France and Italy, we do not have so much trouble with voice placing as they do in other countries.

### SINGING TOO MUCH FROM THE THROAT

“The mistake that many—not all—American and English students make, is that of singing too

much from the throat. For this the English language with its naturally throaty sounds is partly responsible, I think. The vocal student should remember that the voice must be placed with the lips, and not too much from the throat. And my own experience after I left the convent and studied with the talented tenor, Puget, has firmly convinced me that the foundation of all good singing lies in the study of the *bel canto*—it is indispensable. Let students sing the music of the old Italian masters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Porpora, Palestrina and others, if they wish to gain voice control. The young girl who attempts to sing modern music, for instance, without ever having studied the Italian music of the *bel canto* will find that her voice is not well poised. I have always insisted that the pupils who study with me sing Mozart, since he is unexcelled for melody singing and the proper placing of the tone. If the young girl who sings modern music knows her song classics, if she have this *bel canto* foundation, she is far better prepared to overcome the greater difficulties of intonation offered by modern composers.

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### SELECT A TEACHER WHO ILLUSTRATES HER MEANING WITH HER OWN VOICE

“Select a teacher who illustrates her meaning, when she is teaching you, with her own voice. After the death of my old teacher, Puget, I went to Madame Marchesi. But I remained with her only six months. Why? She had long since lost her voice, and could not give a practical *viva voce* example of what she wanted me to do. Madame Laborde, on the other hand, with whom I then took up my studies was my teacher for three years. She was a wonderful coloratura singer—her Rosina was famous—and she was not only able to *tell* me how difficult passages were to be sung and interpreted, but she could *show* me what she meant as well. To Madame Laborde I owe all my success, and, to a large extent, because she could illustrate her meaning with her own voice. To me there is always something illogical in selecting some one who is vocally mute to teach the beauties of tone production. If I could not show my pupils what I mean with my own voice,



I do not think I should feel justified in teaching them.

### SYSTEM AND METHOD

“I do not believe in any one ‘system’ for teaching singing. Each student is different, and so each ‘system’ must be different also. But I have a well-defined *méthode*, in the French sense of the word, of instruction, which I vary and adapt to the individual needs of individual pupils. That I use my own special exercises, scales and *vocalises* goes without saying, and I insist on my pupils working hard while they work. I try to give them style—that quality of singing which is so hard to acquire—and the perfect *legato*; and above all you will find no pupil of mine singing in a *chevrotante* voice, a ‘goaty’ voice, for that is something I will not permit. I insist that the pupil’s voice be well placed, in the masque.

“And I lay the greatest stress on the slow practice of simple exercises. Too many teachers are not exact enough in this respect, in order to please the pupil who lacks patience. I make the girls who study with me in the summer in my home at

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Cabrières sing scales very slowly, in long, long time intervals, in all the keys; and never allow them to sing them fast. No, I do not confine my teaching solely to advanced pupils. There are two kinds of pupils whom I enjoy teaching in particular: the talented advanced pupil, with whom I can at once take up the interpretation of the great rôles, and the beginner. For in her case I have a chance to develop the voice exactly as it should be developed, *before* the student picks up bad habits and defects.

### PSEUDO PUPILS OF FAMOUS TEACHERS

“One thing has always seemed very unjust to me. A pupil will study from one to three months with some famous teacher, and then leave proudly claiming that she is his pupil. How often Jean de Reske has mentioned the fact to me! You cannot perfect a pianist or a violinist in three months, and certainly not a voice. Aside from the harm they do themselves these pseudo pupils wrong the great artists who may be teaching them. People who hear one of these *élèves* and are told they are pupils of Mr. X, or Madame Z,

hold their teachers responsible for their singing, while the student may have taken only a few lessons from the master in question.

### THE "FOURTH VOICE"

"One thing I try to teach them—it cannot be learned by all—is a vocal possession of which I am very proud and jealous, the 'fourth voice.' In *My Life* I have told about the eunuch of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, Mustapha, a Turk, from whom I acquired this strange and lovely register, which he called his 'fourth voice.' It is a gamut of tones which are neither masculine nor feminine in character, but have a certain celestial quality of their own, of the greatest softness and charm. I studied with Mustapha—so much was I impressed by the beauty of these tones which I had heard him sing in the solemn services at St. Peter's—and it cost me three years of unremitting work to perfect my control of this special register. These 'fourth voice' tones are located in the frontal sinus, in the bridge of the nose, and might be compared to the harmonics of the violin. But wait a moment," continued Madame, "why

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do I tell you about them, when it is much simpler to sing them for you!" She threw back her head and produced an ascending flight of clear, full, beautiful tones and then, in the "fourth voice," she repeated the notes she had sung. The tones were like and yet unlike an echo, fainter, yet at the same time more colorful, more crystalline. They were very sweet, with a noticeable difference in *timbre* from the usual tones of the singing voice, and with a distinct bell-like quality—a reflection, delicate and evanescent, rather than an echo of the other voice. "No," said Madame Calvé, "I have never regretted the time and effort I gave to learning these tones, and I teach the secret of their production (a secret in which patience is the principal ingredient) to those among my pupils who seem qualified to learn it.

### GESTURE IN CONCERT SINGING

"It is one of the means of effect, one of the ways of making the voice rouse emotion in the listener. Each and every effect, whether it be one purely vocal, or purely dramatic, whether it lie in the singer's tone or in her technic of de-

livery, is right and legitimate if it is artistic. I have been criticized for using gestures in my concert singing. Such criticism seems pedantic to me. Every song, especially every dramatic song, presents a story or a mood. Merely because the singer is singing the 'Bell Song' from 'Lakmé' on the concert, and not on the operatic stage, should she stand there like a wooden image and not lend the charm of movement and impersonation to her singing?

"If the words of a song suggest or describe action, they call for gesture, in most cases. And no singer with a proper sense for dramatic truth will refrain from gesture if it help to give her listeners a clearer, more vivid idea of what she is singing. I must express myself fully and completely. My gestures on the concert stage are a part of my interpretation of the song I am singing. They are spontaneous, they are part of my natural means of self-expression and—incidentally—though they have been criticized, my audiences seem to like them. So I shall continue to use the expressive gesture on the concert stage, and I would advise every young artist to remem-



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ber that gesture and movement, rightly used, give fire and dramatic vitality to a song-recital program just as they do to an operatic rôle. No student who intends to specialize as a concert singer loses by watching the great singing actresses of the operatic stage, and observing their use of the dramatic gesture to drive home the meaning of the words and music they sing. Of course, the words, as they have inspired the composer to write the song, should also inspire the singer's interpretation of it; and her presentation must be developed out of the ambience of the song itself.

“Finally, there is one thing every student should remember, whether her objective be the opera or the concert stage—she must remember to be herself. I will say nothing about concentration and hard work. I never learned a rôle by sleeping on the score, nor did any one else, and the fact is pretty well established. But to be yourself in your art is sometimes very difficult. It is hard to know where to draw the line between tradition and precept and your own artistic instinct. In such a case, when you are driven to

## EMMA CALVÉ

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choose, rely upon yourself. For only the artist who radiates a personality of her own, who expresses her own self, her own mind, her own soul, instead of the traditions of others, wins to greater achievement and success."







ANNA CASE

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## ANNA CASE

A BOOK in which the art of the concert singer is discussed would be incomplete if it did not represent so notable and deservedly popular an exponent of the art as Anna Case. She is distinctly an American artist, an American girl who has received her entire training in this country, and has achieved success through her own artistic personality and efforts. Some lessons of her experience, which she was kind enough to recount to the writer in the music room of her New York home to help other American girls who cherish vocal ambitions, point valuable morals of vocal procedure for every young singer who aims to make a career.

"Singing in concert versus singing in opera?" said Miss Case. "I believe the choice to a large extent a matter of disposition and temperament. One artist may seem born to sing in opera; an-

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other will express herself most freely and fully on the concert stage. And there is the question of artistic preference. If you wish to become a great opera singer, I think it is almost necessary to hypnotize yourself, to weave a web of illusion about yourself on the stage, in order to portray convincingly emotions which otherwise you could not imagine yourself entertaining.

“On the concert stage, on the other hand, I found I could develop my artistic personal conceptions without hindrance, without insincerity, without pretending feelings which were appropriate to the immediate environment. I found that I welcomed the opportunity to stand alone, open to criticism, with merely a background of piano accompaniment and no orchestra to cover up rough work or lack of tone, because I could be myself. In every opera the art impression created is to a great extent a matter of *ensemble*, and the *ensemble* supports the effort of the individual singer. On the concert platform the artist stands alone, she must create beauty by her own individual tone-coloring and projection of feeling. And this is the greater art.

## ANNA CASE

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### THE CONCERT PROGRAM

“For a concert singer the place of stage scenery, decoration, costume and orchestra, every detail of the operatic *tout ensemble*, is taken by the piano. It is her background and an important one. The concert singer should never make the mistake of preferring an accompanist who is not so good to one who is, fearing that the latter may receive much attention. Choose the best accompanist you can secure, for the better your background on the recital stage the more successful you will be.

“My experience has led me to use two types of concert programs, one for large cities like New York, the other for tours through the country in general. The metropolitan type of concert program, of course, must appeal to a highly trained and eclectic taste; the country-wide type of program should appeal more to audiences who are deprived of the ‘big town’ opportunities, but who love music instinctively and react to a clear, melodic line and direct emotional expression. In New York my first group may consist of old

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fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian songs; outside, I may vary it, still singing 'period' songs in this group, but substituting older folk songs for *bel canto* art songs of Bach. My second group usually consists of *Lieder*, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, and other older and modern masters of the type. A third group of modern and semimodern composers, Debussy and others, French, Italian, Spanish—the nationality does not matter, the song does—of a lighter character, leads up to a final group of American songs. The general aim of the program is to cover songs of all styles and periods suited to the quality and character of my voice, laying special stress on the American song. Every concert singer should consider her own quality and type of voice first of all in selecting the material for her concert programs; for naturally she will be at her best in the songs best adapted to her own vocal personality, and the number of fine songs is so great that she should never be at a loss to make a thoroughly adequate personal selection. And I find it worth while spending hours on the same songs, going over them again and again to be able to

interpret them the way I want the audience to feel them.

### THE ENCORE SONG

“As to the encore song? I never select it myself. I never say to myself before a concert: ‘I shall sing this as an encore.’ I believe in letting my particular audience of the moment choose its own encores. Before I step on the platform I have several groups of encore songs at hand, of different types—classic, modern, folk songs, sentimental, humorous. I am subconsciously getting their collective reaction, and choose the encore for a group or section according to the particular song in that group which has received the most spontaneous applause. Thus, in an audience while on tour I may find that ‘Annie Laurie’ is a first favorite, in which case I use as an encore some other lovely old folk song of the same type, and know that I have chosen the encore my audience wanted. I have never known this procedure to fail, following it out, because I am sure of giving my listeners what they most appreciate and not what I think they want.



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## WHAT MAKES FOR SUCCESS ON THE CONCERT STAGE

“What makes for success on the concert stage? Voice, quality of voice and personality. Then too, there is the power to express the very inwardness of a song, to absolutely ‘put over’ the meaning of the words in your music. And in order to do this, good diction—something far too many singers slight—is a necessity. Tonally a song may be projected in a beautiful manner, but if the singer’s diction be indifferent, it will fail of its effect. Besides, good diction actually helps the proper production of tone. When singing in public it also is well to remember that you are not singing for yourself, but for your audience; and that your personality and its right projection have as much to do with your success as your voice.

## THE HALL AND THE SINGER

“Of course, if one’s voice is properly placed there should be no difference in its carrying power. A small voice, if properly placed, will

carry farther than a big voice which is not placed as it should be. But, no matter how well placed the voice may be, the size and the acoustics of individual halls influence the effect the singer produces upon the audience. Even when the acoustics are not the best, a concert hall which seats from 1,500 to 2,000 people is the most desirable. In a hall of this size the singer has an opportunity of expressing her personality to best advantage. Her voice and her personality will reach out easily to all parts of the hall. When you have a hall which accommodates an audience of 3,000, say, it is harder to throw out your personality far enough to reach the seats at the back of the hall. One's personality has a different area of projection, which if possible should not be exceeded. In a hall seating 5,000 people a very great effort of personality is required to drive home the musical and artistic impression. A hall of this size is better adapted for an orchestra concert than a recital with piano. Take, for instance, some charming, delicate song, in which the general dynamic scheme is one of *pianos* and *pianissimos*—it will be lost in a hall of this size.

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## CONCERT STAGE HINTS

“There are a hundred and one details which come up in connection with the artistic and effective presentation of a song program on the concert stage. Some are practical, some are æsthetic, some are both. [ Make your entrance with a smile, not an artificial one; but the happy smile which ought to come naturally to your face at the sight of an audience ready to welcome you. The public reads your mind, it is telepathic. If you come on with a smile, it is prepared to smile with you; but if you show a sober face, its mood also drops. And never come on the stage suppressing feelings which resulted from some upset or unpleasantness; the public will feel that you are disturbed, and its receptiveness will be affected. If you feel very tired, try to rally some reserve forces before coming out to sing. I have, on occasion, sung a song program when very tired, and the reaction of the audience was unmistakable. They listened and applauded politely, but nothing more. Above all, take your work seri-

ously—and your audience will receive it with all deserved appreciation.]

### CONCERT STAGE DRAMATICS

“There is a certain analogy between some piano accompaniments and the dramatic expression of some songs. The singer is always apt to find piano accompaniments which are lacking in tone color, in which there seems to be a hiatus between the vocal line and the accompanimental background. In such cases at times it is necessary to fill in with octaves or chords.

“In some songs, too, the dramatic element to give full effect, must be emphasized more than in others. I do not mean by that overemphasized. The young singer is all too apt to think that walking about the stage and waving her arms lends dramatic expression to songs. The expressional effect, so far as movements are concerned, must come naturally out of the meaning of its words. [ And facial expression and bodily poise are the great mediums of dramatic emphasis in concert singing.

“In the old Swedish folk dance, the ‘Dal Pol-

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ska,' you can fairly feel the man raise his partner from the ground and swing her in the dance. And it is not only natural but almost necessary for the singer to sway her body slightly to be in harmony with the song expression.

"In songs of the more classic type, where the programmatic feature is absent, songs which idealize emotion in music—love, religion, a spiritual thought—action and gesture fall away. The spiritual, the ideal is best in the music alone.

"Many singers spoil the interpretation of a love song, for example, by placing it on a lower personal instead of a spiritual plane.

### THE OPERA SONG IN RECITAL

"Frankly, I sing operatic airs in my recital programs because people like and want them. As an artist I feel, of course, that the operatic aria does not belong on the recital program, though quite in order in the mixed program in which the singer appears with other artists. Then, too, outside the large cities, it is to a certain extent a question of prestige with the artist to sing operatic airs, and prestige is an important asset for



every singer. On tour, if I did not sing operatic arias, people would think it was because I could not do so. They want a certain amount of coloratura. A number of positive vocal brilliancy, like an aria from 'Lucia' or 'Norma,' wins recognition, as a rule, when sung on tour; while more truly musical things like Bach, Mozart and Handel, exquisite in their clean-cut classic beauty, are not always appreciated. The modern opera air, an aria from 'Tosca,' 'Louise' or 'Butterfly,' in nearly all cases, however, can be successfully used in place of bravura airs from the older Italian operas.

### DRESS ON THE CONCERT STAGE

"The concert singer should make legitimate most of her personal advantages. An attractive personality, a face and figure which pleases, help to establish the bond of sympathy between audience and singer which should be welded with her entrance. It is the singer's duty to be attractively gowned, as well as she can afford; and it is far better to wear a bright dress, a sparkling, brilliant dress of some kind rather than one dark

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and somber in color. Audiences are very susceptible to colors; a bright dress emphasizes the mood of happiness and lightness which the singer wishes to establish; it underlines her smile. A dark dress, on the other hand, is apt to lessen an appreciative attitude.

"The costume recital? I think it very interesting, and know that many artists favor it, but personally I have never felt drawn to it. On the concert stage, where even dress, in spite of all its importance, is only a detail of the artist's personality, it seems to me that costume may easily strike too loud an individual note, at the expense of the artist and her music. This is, of course, merely a personal opinion of my own, and by no means to be construed as a condemnation of the costume recital, or those who give it.

"Personally, I love the old classic lines in dress and always strive for them in the evening dress I wear while singing. Last season the critics said I wore a 'Jenny Lind' costume. The fact was that I was not even aware the dress made a period effect. I had selected it only because of its lines and beauty.

### STUDY AND PRACTICE

“My own training would lead me to advise principally one teacher, if an unusually good one, for every vocal student. I myself studied with a remarkable teacher, the late Madame Ostrom-Renard. When I began to study with her my voice had a compass of only one and a half octaves, and I now have the three-octave range. Madame Renard was at home in six languages; she understood placing the voice to a remarkable degree and she had the best conception of the Italian *bel canto*, acquired from the elder Mme. Marchesi, Charles Gounod and Maestro Berg, the teacher of Jenny Lind. Though I never cared for coloratura as much as for dramatic song, Madame Renard developed my coloratura and kept it up for me. If she had a fault, it was her excessive modesty. With such a teacher it is easy to see that I cannot feel much sympathy for the vocal student who wanders from one instructor to the other.

“I use certain *vocalises* and exercises devised especially for my voice by Madame Renard: sus-

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tained notes on different vowels, trills, coloratura, etc. But I am not, perhaps, the best example for the vocal student as regards practice. I have always disliked being tied down to certain hours for practice or anything else. When not on tour I plan to practice a little every day. I also remember that the vocal cords are the most delicate organs in the body, and that practice should come *before* any other exertion, not *after*. If I have been down town shopping, I do not attempt to practice when I come home. When on tour, singing three or more concerts a week, I omit routine practice. Perhaps about five o'clock in the afternoon I may run over a few *vocalises* to stimulate the vocal cords, or, if the cords are not in good condition, do so at eleven in the morning, but nothing more.

### FATIGUE

“Bodily or mental fatigue always reacts on the voice. I do little walking, and take little physical exercise when on tour. Constant traveling on the railroad is in itself a tax on the strength, and it is an artist's first duty to give her audience the best

of herself. Before a concert I eat a light dinner at about five o'clock—preferring chicken or the breast of guinea fowl, rice and vegetables to beefsteak—to gain the strength necessary to sing in the evening. After the performance I sometimes eat some additional food.

“In my opinion a great deal of the ‘colds’ trouble singers have with their voices results from colds more or less directly due to improper food. Every singer should understand her own physique perfectly, and learn what food she can or cannot eat. If the body is kept free from poisonous toxins, the voice will be in good condition. I use neither lozenges nor atomizer, but I have one certain gargle, a special prescription, of astringent qualities, which I employ only when my voice is fatigued, as a stimulant. And you may form an idea of how frequently I resort to it when I tell you that I used it two weeks ago for the *first time in two years*.

“Nearly all the colds which affect the voice result from indigestion, in my opinion. I know that I once, when I was in the best of health, had a bad attack of laryngitis as a result of eating



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plum pudding. Not until I had taken glass after glass of hot water and thoroughly washed the poison out of my system could I sing again. I never eat sea food or canned goods of any kind while on tour. It is better to do without lobster or oysters than run the chance of ptomaine poisoning and find yourself incapable of filling your engagements.

### EXERCISE

“As regards exercise I can only tell you what I have found best for myself. It might not apply to others. My whole theory of bodily exercise, as a singer, is that it must never overfatigue. I believe in getting as much sleep as possible, especially while on tour. When I can I spend the whole day in bed in the drawing-room of my Pullman before a concert. I adore horseback riding when not singing, but I could not spend several hours in the saddle in the morning or afternoon and do justice to a concert the same night. As a rule I have very little time for physical exercise. When I have a cold, or overwork, or under nervous strain, I have often found

that osteopathy is the best of restoratives. I never risk deranging my stomach or nerves with patent medicines.

### THE SPIRITUAL FACTOR IN SONG

“But all these details—practice, exercise, eating, dress, traveling—are only incidental to art. There are certain ideals which every singer desiring to achieve success should bear in mind, one of the most important, and one not sufficiently dwelt upon, I think, is the emphasis to be laid on the spiritual factor in song interpretation. In songs the material or a more spiritual poetic side can be emphasized, and it is the latter which should be developed. The more spiritual, the more ideal quality in interpretation always represents the finest and highest. And this quality the artist must develop out of herself. It must come of her own heart and soul, and cannot be acquired from others. I always think of it as the greatest individual factor in my own work as a singer, and it is for this reason that I earnestly commend its cultivation to all those who hope to make a career in song.”







FLORENCE EASTON

AS FIORDILIGI IN "COSI FAN TUTTE"



## FLORENCE EASTON

FLORENCE EASTON-MACLENNAN, the distinguished dramatic soprano, is one of those *prime donne* whose superior musical intelligence, eclectic vocal gifts and winning stage presence make it possible for her to exercise her art with mastery both on the operatic and the concert stage. In the comfortable drawing-room of her centrally located New York hotel the artist talked freely and interestingly to the writer of singing, both in opera and in recital, in the light of her work. The value to the individual reader of many of the hints she let fall will be self-evident as she reads.

"I had no thought of singing, let alone of the opera when I began to study music," said the singer. "I began as a pianist—early, for I made my first public appearance at the age of eight—and I have never regretted it. The singer who can play her score at the piano and accompany

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herself, has a great advantage. She does not have to watch the conductor like those who cannot gain an intimate personal acquaintance with a score at first hand, and do not know the other parts. I first studied singing seriously at the Royal Academy of Music, in London, where I learned all sorts of pretty little songs, the idea being that I would become a professional ballad singer. But the Royal Academy of Music also gave an excellent general course; besides my two weekly voice lessons, there were two in piano, two in harmony and two in musical history and other subjects.

“Then I went to Paris, to an old friend of my father’s, Elliott Haslam, a splendid coach, who helped my tone placement. But not long after that my father died, and my grandparents—who had the good old-fashioned idea that woman’s place to sing was the home—discouraged all my efforts, and even carried paternalism so far as to select a husband for me. When this point had been reached I quietly disappeared and once more went back to my vocal work. [ Eventually I made my *début*, met and married my husband

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the following year, and have been singing 'out of the home' and 'in' ever since.

### PRACTICAL POINTS FOR THE SINGER

"To my mind, about the worst thing a vocal student can do is to run to a new teacher about every three months, as so many do. If a student really knows what she wants—which is not always the case—she should be able to tell whether she is getting it after the first four or five lessons. I do vocal exercises every morning to keep my voice in trim, just as I do physical exercises to keep my body fit. As a rule I use the Viardot *Vocalises* (Book Two) every day, unless I have a lot of singing to do that day, or am very, very tired.

"Then there is the abuse of the voice in practice. But—I never practice vocal exercises with *full voice* more than fifteen minutes a day! Not a minute more, and if you know absolutely what you need this is enough. But you can practice hours (with intervals) studying new rôles, songs or interpretations, if you sing *mezza voce*. Never sing your top notes needlessly. Old Sims Reeves used to say that every singer had just so many top

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notes and used them up, one by one. In other words, when a singer uses her top notes she is drawing on her vocal capital, using something which cannot be replaced. Of course, first you must learn to produce your high notes. But, once you know *how* to sing them, and have them settled in your mind, then be sparing in their use. They call for a tremendous output of physical energy.

### THE PRESENT-DAY OPERA SINGER AND MODERN OPERA

“Physical energy, incidentally, is one of the main requisites of the modern opera singer. ‘Singing in opera’ is a magic phrase to many an ambitious young student. But think of what the opera singer has to go through to justify its being used in connection with her! First of all, there are the rehearsals. Last week we had a dress rehearsal nearly every day at the Metropolitan. Sunday (with a rest Monday), Tuesday and Wednesday (another rest on Thursday), singing again Friday, resting Saturday, and singing on Sunday. Do you wonder we feel

weary when the week comes to an end, though it really does not come to an end, since we go right on through the season.

“And then the eternal vocal readjustment! You study a rôle at home, in a small room, at the piano. You step out on the stage to sing and—the conductor cannot hear you! One can use only a very light voice, a delicate thread of tone, when singing in a room. As a result, things so rehearsed sound far too *piano* on the stage. This is still more apparent in a crowded house, and especially if the singer has a solo at the end of the first act. So the rehearsal voice must be re-adjusted for practical stage use. In this and other connections I have always been grateful for criticism which gave me real ‘pointers.’ My husband is one of my best constructive critics, and—an opera singer himself—his advice and his suggestions are usually very helpful. He has the right critical viewpoint, and the fact that I am his wife does not prejudice him in my favor.

“In opera there is not, practically, any light, dainty vocal work, save in coloratura. The vocal ‘Gavotte’ from Mignon? Perhaps, but it is



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usually cut in actual performance. It is too fragile for big-voiced people; a concert number rather than an operatic one. In fact, it seems to me that entire operas lose charm by being given on too large a stage. Massenet's 'Manon,' for example, is at its best heard in a small house like the Paris *Opéra Comique* or the New York Park Theatre, but on a big stage . . . We need an *Opéra Comique*-size house here, where 'Bohème,' 'Madame Butterfly,' 'Così fan tutte,' and even 'Carmen' could be heard on a small stage.

"I have run the operatic gamut as regards voice change. Before I went to Madame Schön-René, a pupil of Viardot and Manuel Garcia, one of the finest teachers living, I had lost my voice for a time. But it came back after a year's rest, during which I did no singing at all—and the very first rôle I sang then was Gilda! I should advise the vocal student whose own instinct tells her that she is not making headway, to take a complete rest for a time, instead of running off to another teacher at once. I have tried changing from coloratura to dramatic singing, and then back to lyric, and once more to dramatic. I have

sung everything, from Gilda to Isolda. I first learned to use my voice properly in the middle and lower registers when I was singing Marguerita, Elsa and Elizabeth, and the strain for a girl of eighteen, I was no older than that at the time, was a severe one.

### GRAND OPERAS NOT MADE WITHOUT BREAKING VOICES

“You cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs, and you cannot make grand opera, especially modern grand opera without—in the long run—breaking voices. Modern opera is the severest strain on the voice which may be imagined. In modern grand opera we get further and further away from singing. We are evidently there to be seen quite as much as to be heard. And seen how? We rush around, we fall, we roll down stairs, we do everything but stand on our heads. At the same time, to sing, and sing well, supposes repose and deep breathing.

“I am a lyric dramatic soprano, but I never took a lesson in acting in my life. I have wished time and again that I might have become a great

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actress, and I go to the theater as much as possible. In these days when we *prime donne* are supposed to be 'singing actresses,' there is no better object lesson for us than the 'legitimate' stage. And yet there is an element of the ludicrous to me in all acting in opera. How can you *act*, if you have to hold a sustained note for six measures in the middle of an emotional climax, with your eyes glued on the conductor? And Carmen's entrance song! I have seen many Carmens, but I have never seen that song done any differently. The first time Carmen sees Don José she simply has to wander around the stage until she has finished singing her song. There is no escape from it, and since it is all any Carmen can do, every Carmen has to do it. She has to wait to throw the flower, and the same effect is always produced in exactly the same place. There is no spontaneity.

"After all you cannot rage, weep or dance violently without losing your breath—and yet you are supposed to do so. No voice, no matter how robust, is going to last indefinitely if it has to sing year in year out above an orchestra of eighty

or ninety musicians. It simply cannot be done, and the fact frequently has been proven!

### SOME RICHARD STRAUSS RÔLES

“I created the title rôle of Strauss’ ‘Elektra’ in England, in English, and before I went on the English *tournée*, Strauss took a good deal of trouble to explain the character of his heroine to me. He wanted people to feel sorry for Elektra, wanted her to awaken sympathy, not horror. In England I sang the rôle in English, then when I returned to Berlin some one else who was to sing fell ill, and I sang the rôle in German with such success that Strauss insisted on conducting the second performance. Strauss is a delightful coach and among others, I studied the rôles of Elektra, Salome, and Sophie with him.

“In ‘Salome’ he had his own ideas anent the dance. I have a most amusing recollection of the physically as well as musically great conductor prancing earnestly around his room, impersonating Salome in her dance. He preferred to have the singer who sang the rôle dance the dance. This was because, historically, there was nothing

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professional about Salome's dancing. She was a princess who could dance because it was an accomplishment an aristocratic lady of her day would be expected to possess. But she was no *danseuse*. Salome did not dance in any Winter-Garden frame of mind, either, but with her whole soul centered on getting the head of John the Baptist. She even stops dancing a few times and looks into the cistern. According to Strauss the dance must make the effect of an improvisation, not a set number.

"The Strauss scores are all difficult for the singer. But they are not unvocal unless the singer does not know how to use her voice, does not know how to sing against the orchestra. In the modern scores the singer often has the feeling that no one can hear a single note she utters above the orchestra. Yet there is no use in forcing the voice, for even a trumpet would not be heard above the orchestral *ensemble* unchained in full *fortissimo*. There are always places, however, in Strauss as in Wagner, where the voice is used like a single orchestral voice. In the finale of Act One, in the 'Rosenkavalier,' for instance, a vocal



whisper can be heard all over the house; the instrumental music is used to relieve, not drown the voice.

“I think the ‘Rosenkavalier’ loses when sung in French. Certain languages seem to injure the music of certain scores. Thus, while ‘Lohengrin’ and ‘Tristan’ are lovely in Italian, ‘Tannhäuser,’ ‘Elektra’ and the ‘Rosenkavalier’ seem to demand doing in German or English. One recollection of the Elektra rôle I treasure is connected with my first Berlin performance. Richard Strauss’ wife is very reserved and anything but effusive. I had never met her; yet she came around to my dressing room after the performance, embraced me and said: ‘I have never really heard Elektra until to-night! Not only did I catch every word of the text, but you made me feel the story as well.’

### SUGGESTIONS FOR THE WOULD-BE CONCERT SINGER

“At the present moment the country is full of concert singers—I’d say overrun, if that did not sound as though we poor singers were some kind

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of pestilential visitation, like bacilli, or locusts or jack rabbits—and for a time the American *débutante* on the recital stage will find it hard to get a hearing. It is quite natural for the opera singer, the *prima donna*, to make a recital tour in the United States. [ In Europe she is singing opera ten months in the year. Here the opera season lasts no more than five or six months, and she is obliged to fill in the remaining time with concert engagements. ] Concert work is very hard for an opera singer after the opera season, during which her every note and every gesture has been projected over a big orchestra. In recital she has to hold down her tone, sing with a check on her voice. If in the recital hall I were to let out my voice as I do in the big operatic climaxes at the Metropolitan, I could sing no more than two or three notes before the people would run out of the place. When it comes to practical hints for the recital singer, I can think of several. First, the young artist who is just beginning should not be an impertinent minx, and throw gracious hand kisses to an audience which may be shocked rather than gratified by them. Again,

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she should not try to show endurance in her programs. She should only sing the songs she can 'put across' with ease. And she should not be afraid to transpose a song which is a tone or half tone too high for her. It is no disgrace. Then, she should always look at the words of her songs first. She should not even try the music till she has read the words, and made sure they are not silly and will not strike the public as such. And, finally, while it is her duty to look attractive, she need not decorate herself like a Christmas tree."

The *couturière* knocked, was admitted and graciously sent to another room. But that instinct to which the *diva* had alluded, the one which informs the vocal student there is something wrong with her voice, suggested to her interlocutor that it might be wise to take his leave. The distinguished singer had spoken too well and interestingly to deserve anything but gratitude and consideration.



## GERALDINE FARRAR

IT is easy to interview great artists, for they themselves are invariably unaffected and direct. Having personality they need not cultivate it. Geraldine Farrar, incidentally, has more than personality; she has charm, and she radiates it just as Mme. Ernestine Schumann Heink does whole-souled heartiness and amiable good-nature. It is the charm of quick intelligence joined to natural kindness of heart, and that personal grace and loveliness which have given her a unique place in the heart of the American public. When an artist reaches the position attained by Geraldine Farrar, practically all she may care to say for publication is of general interest, especially since, in her case, she can always be trusted to touch on her subject in a novel and interesting way. But Miss Farrar made clear to the writer, when he had the honor of calling on her, that she had a definite object in view in talking to him.



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“The readers of your book, especially those young singers who look forward to making a career in opera,” said she, “ought to be able to get something constructive out of what I may say, something which may be of use to them, some opinions and reflections that are the outcome of my own experience and may be of value to them on that account. I do not wish merely to talk for talk’s sake, or just to give you an interview, but to express some really constructive ideas.

### SINGERS MUST USE THEIR BRAINS

“In this age of ours it seems to me that the first thing for the singer to realize is, that she must use her brains, her intellect, as well as her vocal cords. I question whether any century has shown so strong a development of the mental, of the intellectual factor in singing as this one. I mean intellect in the larger sense, the intellect which gives a soul to emotion, color to feeling, mind to heart. There was a time when voice, and voice alone was sufficient, absolute beauty of voice, pure sensuous beauty of tone, without the light of artistic understanding to give it inner

radiance. But that time has passed, and while to a certain extent every singer must depend in the beginning of her career on the intellect and experience of others, the time comes when she must pass from the passive, the receptive stage, to the consciously active one—she must think and do for herself. She must use her own mind, for, sooner or later, if she sincerely desires to forge ahead, she reaches the point where she must control her own mental equipment or resign herself to failure.

### PROGRESS OR RETROGRESSION

“There is no standing still, no marking time for the operatic singer. Either she must progress or retrograde, and retrogression is by far the easier of the two. And, in nearly every case, retrogression is shown when the *singer* inclines to shift the responsibility for her limitations on the shoulders of her *teacher* or teachers. It is an almost unfailing sign that she either cannot, or will not think for herself, and without self-analysis, self-criticism and self-understanding, there can be no development. It may be

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possible to hire others to do your thinking for you in the field of commerce or industry, but the artist who aspires to real greatness will rely solely upon his or her own storage battery of accumulative knowledge and control of forces.

### DO NOT STOP STUDYING ON YOUR FIRST APPEARANCE IN PUBLIC

“There is too much adverse criticism, I think, of singers ‘who come out too soon,’ who ‘begin singing in public at too early an age.’ This has always seemed unfair to me. Some of the greatest singers and instrumental artists too, for that matter, have made their bow to the public at an early age. After all, the singer, the operatic singer in particular, lives (I speak of her stage life, of course) only as long as her voice does. The operatic singer must start young. If she waits until she is forty, she might as well never start at all. The real trouble, as I see it, is *not that singers appear in public when they are too young, but that too often they stop work, they stop studying after their first public appear-*

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*ances*, or, what is just as bad, *they do not study in the right way*. Every one has to leave school or college some time and stand on his own feet—the trouble with most singers is that they believe they can travel the road to success standing on some one else's feet. Too many—instead of settling down to serious self-examination—keep on the 'go' from one vocal studio to another, from one vocal teacher in vogue to another, in the vain hope of finding one who will do all their thinking for them and perform vocal miracles. They do not give themselves the chance to work and develop out of themselves. Of course, in saying this I am taking a good fundamental training for granted—and one teacher can give that as well as half a dozen. In this respect, singing does not differ from cabinetmaking, baseball or prize fighting—there has to be material to work on and there has to be a good groundwork, a reliable foundation. But just as it takes more than a certain weight, chest expansion and knowledge of the rules of the game to make a good football player, so it takes more than technic and

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a natural vocal equipment to make a real singer, and especially an opera singer.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THINKING FOR YOURSELF

“Personally, I have no faith in the more or less customary twenty-eight minute vocal lesson. It is too short a time in which to learn much. And the fact that one or another teacher can ‘point with pride’ to one or another star pupil does not always mean much—the one exceptional pupil may be an unintentional decoy, with a fine natural voice. Not that I wish to lessen the merit of good vocal teachers; but the pupil who has learned much from competent teachers, who has sung in public, should realize when the time comes that she herself has always to take the initiative, that there is no one else who can hear her, sense her own weakness and defects, and comprehend her own needs as she herself can. When I started twenty years ago, I had student companions, girls vocally far more gifted than I. They practiced in desultory fashion, and sang for a few years—when the moment came for



mental control and self-examination they were not equal to the task—and the pretty voice had succumbed to the ravages of abuse and ignorance. They were only vocally, not mentally gifted. You would hear them sing, and how many to-day are like them, and say: 'Yes, a lovely voice, but not interesting!' Well, they simply never arrived. They could not shoulder their own burdens, or pass the barrier of their own limitations.

### LILLI LEHMANN'S TEACHING PRINCIPLES

"If one has a good teacher that teacher should have a chance to 'make good,' as they say. I had only one great teacher, Lilli Lehmann, and I studied with her for years, till the war intervened. In her personal instruction, just as in the wonderful book on singing she has written—and this holds good of any really fine teacher—she makes you *think* for yourself. You can't swing intelligent singing on mere voice; the soul, the picture of what you are singing must first be flashed on the brain. And that does not reach the singer by warbling along from studio to

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studio, but results from concentration and a receptive intelligence.

“Lilli Lehmann is not responsible for the things I may do that are wrong or undeveloped. Her great art left nothing to chance, as regards development on the line of mental vocal culture. Physiologically she went only so far as to create the mental picture—the most important thing of all. The French cling to the belief that everything lies in the *masque*, and so we have the more exclusively nasal focus of one color, even when there are many notes to a phrase; the Italians teach on the open *Ah*, the free and easy vowel of their native tongue, and the first thing you know we have an exaggerated tremolo like the bleating of a sheep. Lilli Lehmann combines both ideas in their right proportion and keeps the voice moving in constant change of color. She teaches one to control both throat and nose resonances, and develops a whole vocal range of moving vibrations.

“One of Lilli Lehmann’s great sayings is, that if you accustom your mind and muscles to certain regular brain-controlled pictures you will always

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have a technic you can rely upon at the necessary moment, it may not be there in its ultimate perfection, if you are not in the mood, if physically or mentally you are not at your best, but you can depend upon it to carry you through with credit to yourself. For few operatic singers always feel like singing when they must. If I only sang when I really and truly felt the urge I would probably have an exceedingly unimportant career. And for that very reason the opera singer must have her material well in hand, depending only upon herself. When the curtain rises, she alone must accomplish—none other can aid her in those few hours before the public.”

### CARRYING OWLS TO ATHENS

Miss Farrar made no allusion to owls and Athens, but they occurred to the writer when she declared: “When it comes to advising the opera singer, I am the recipient of continual advice, quite unsolicited advice, myself, from all kinds of people, and cranks with some new-found *vocal miracle*. Practically every week I get letters, and I realize that they are meant kindly, telling

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me of one or another well-known singing teacher who could help me correct defects in my singing. Now any intelligent singer has an open ear for real constructive criticism, advice from which she can draw actual profit. And if I thought for a single moment that any one in the vocal world could give me more than Lilli Lehmann, or add to the independence her teaching has created for me, I would have no hesitancy in going to him at once. But up to the present time I know of no one. The studios are jammed with teachers and pupils, but results show a very poor percentage of actual singers of individuality and great personal appeal. Voices there are in abundance, but few artists. No great artist can live by the bread of pedagogic instruction alone—and self-analysis is something you must do for yourself. The real teacher will show you how, and if he cannot he is no better than a mechanic—something not desirable in our world of music.

### CRITIC AND CRITICISM

“The general idea is that the opera singer asks only for praise, and scorns anything but com-

mendatory criticism. And yet no artist is keener, more alert than the opera singer to get something of concrete value from criticism. Think of what it would mean to an artist if every critical consideration of a performance contained some really constructive idea, some hint which would enable the singer to lend an added beauty to an interpretation, a new loveliness to a melody line! But you can't embody constructive criticism in six lines of type, especially if the critic be fagged, and this quite aside from the incidental influence of personal feeling, digestion, momentary mood, pet theories in the case of writers who combine the rôle of vocal teacher with that of critic, etc. And it is, in fact, wrong in the professional, especially the opera singer, to expect the critic, who has to write something, whether he be inspired or not, to be without some human frailties.

"Just as an instance of how real improvement is not noticed, while a slight fault is dwelt upon out of all proportion, there is Tetrazzini's singing here in 1919. I heard her do remarkable things. Yet when one of her high notes fell amiss, it was dwelt upon *ad nauseam*, but not a word



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said about that exquisite *legato* octave which she had acquired since her Hammerstein days. Henry T. Finck is one of the few critics who really gives the artist credit for what she does, and tries to help her in a constructive way. When he wrote of my Marguerite recently it was not only because he said that 'my voice had come back,' that it was 'never lovelier in quality, never more spontaneous, more saturated with emotion,' that his article was appreciated—though I also enjoyed reading that—but because his whole criticism showed he understood the unremitting hard work and study I had devoted to realizing my ideals of what this rôle and others should be. It is an inspiration when the intelligent critic gives the singer credit for what she has tried hard to do. It aids her to accomplish her utmost in that difficult and delicate combination of song and acting which alone makes the heroines of opera real and lifelike to an audience, and gives their music compelling power. I had been sick for four years with very little vocal means to go on with, yet I never gave in. You can imagine what it means to me to know that my perseverance, my

devotion to the ideals of my art have not been vain, also that I could rely on a mental help to bridge a physical disability.

### HOW TO BECOME A PRIMA DONNA

“The very first requisite is an iron will, to work like a galley slave, and to concentrate every energy of many talents combined. An operatic career should commence early. No singer at fifty can sing as she did at twenty, for although the great artist may put her spirit, her soul, her experience behind her voice when she is older, she cannot restore to it the intangible bloom of youth. The singer who plans an operatic career must be willing to submit herself to a hard *régime* of study and sacrifice. She must eat, exercise, live generally with an ever present thought of its effect on her voice and appearance. Of what use is the projection of a beautiful mental picture by means of a fine voice if the physical attributes do not correspond, if the singer’s appearance contradicts her voice? Nowadays the public demands the ultimate.

“Ceaseless vigilance is the price of operatic

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mastery. For twenty years I have followed the same regular course of sitting down at the piano at nine o'clock and working until one. There are certain phrases in each opera of the repertory, which are individually difficult to different individual singers. And these phrases must be smooth, must be perfect, must lie ready in the consciousness and voice of the artist against a call at any time. Keeping them there is a matter of practice, of thinking, of concentration. The singer must always keep in perfect working trim, just like the fencer or football player. And once the aspirant has made up her mind to a thorough *régime* it soon ceases to be a drudgery. The training the singer used to get in the theaters of the German residential cities was wonderful. There they knew their business and their music, and the average German theater orchestra was admirable. Routine was invaluable—nothing was left to chance.

### WHERE OPERA SINGERS OFTEN FAIL

“But all too many opera singers are deficient in the very things in which they should excel.

Though they should work like galley slaves there is no reason why they should look like them. The public idealizes its operatic heroines, and they should try to live up to the ideal portrayed. There is no excuse on their part for frownsiness, for lack of neatness and charm. It means the sacrifice of gluttony and dissipation. Why have a glorious voice, and when you come on the stage look like something which has been delivered by auto truck? Perhaps it is easier to forgive a man in this connection than a woman. I am quite free to say that there are few opera singers who can read at sight, who do not have to have their music pounded into their heads, and who are capable of singing without having their eyes glued agonizingly on the conductor. The world is full of books, of sculpture, of paintings, or interests for mind and soul. Yet they never read, they never have an intellectual reaction: food, drink and sleep seem to sum up their idea of spending the hours when free from the footlights.

“The aspirant to operatic honors must always remember that operatic singing is the ‘limping sister’ of music, even if the most gaudily attired,

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that seventy-five per cent of the people who go to 'hear' opera, want first to 'hear' it through the medium of the eye. She must bear in mind that the world of opera is one of illusion, of fantasy, of exaggeration—and that it is hard to nurse poetic and fantastic illusions, no matter how fine a voice is trying to convey them, when the eye is oppressed by the sight of some three hundred pounds of human avoirdupois, ill-fitting costumes, wigs, awkward stage deportment or ill-timed mannerisms.

### THE CLASSIC AND THE MODERN REPERTORY

"One difficult point is the great difference between the classic and modern repertory and its demands on the present-day singer. The scores of the older repertory are more purely vocal in general, their heroines more dramatically quiescent. There is not the same call for passionate acting, for energetic synchronization of music and physical action. The discreeter orchestrations allow full sway to the singer to develop her tones without stress. But modern opera is dif-



ferent. Now ninety men do their best, collectively, to make the singer shriek her head off. One has all sorts of almost impossible stage actions to contend with; running up and down stairs—which is not the best preparation for a burst of song—and all manner of violent actions up to turning somersaults is expected of the singing actress. Formerly, all she had to do was to step out on the stage and pay attention to nothing but her song. In fact, so different are the two types of opera, that to ask any great exponent of the modern dramatic score to sing a Bellini aria, would be like asking Dempsey to pick up a pin.

### LENDING COLOR TO OPERATIC CHARACTERIZATION

“How to lend color to one’s operatic impersonations is another thing with which no teacher can endow the singer. The latter must have her own vision of the character she desires to create from her point of feeling, physical and mental. And this vision must come out of her own brain and heart—it cannot be built up out of studio

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coaching. That is why people and books, mental and human interests, anything and everything which awakens and stimulates the intelligence, which broadens the viewpoint, are supremely necessary to the operatic singer. For the time being she *is* the heroine of her rôle, and in order to make the character she is portraying convincing she must know in detail not only how people dressed, but also how they walked, spoke and thought in the century in which they lived. For every century has its own mannerisms, its little details of custom in the outward expression of its life, its own mental habits reflected in action. These the singer must know and feel if her portrayal of character is to convey the illusion of truth. A wide education is indispensable.

“Among women opera singers too many do not know how to manage their gowns or their feet, too many male singers trip on their swords, or look ridiculous when they try to fence with them. Here the French training is far in advance of the Italian, and one reason why nearly all French artists have grace and distinction on the stage is because of it. In the case of the

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Italian singers less stress is laid on acting deportment—the demands made upon them are purely vocal. Practically the only great Italian singer who has gone beyond his own country's repertory was Caruso. And what tremendous strides this wonderfully intelligent artist made from the beginning of his career! As an example of artistic self-development his career should be an incentive to every operatic student.

### MARGUERITE VERSUS ZAZA

“One difficulty in repertory work is the need for rapid and absolute change from a rôle like that of Zaza to one like Marguerite in ‘Faust.’ When I sing Zaza on Wednesday night, and Marguerite on Friday night, it means that I must absolutely and unconditionally change my personality, my mental picture and *voice* to rightly interpret each character. It would be an absolute physical impossibility for me to pitch both of these rôles in the same key, to adjust them to the same color scheme. The music sung by Marguerite belongs to the old, pure style of *bel canto*. Any one who remembers the Marguerites of older

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days will remember that they sang the rôle with considerable physical placidity. In our own day, Marguerite, though still a heroine of the older repertory, must be made less wooden; her rôle is a real one, and to keep pace with present-day demands, must be sung with a different technic and a different mental viewpoint. Yet, for all this, it is still a part which presents an absolute contrast with that of Zaza. In singing Marguerite the closed French nasals tend to give you only one half your proper vocal power, hence in keeping with her character, you can make the voice more spiritual, more ethereally pure—what is technically called, *voix blanche*.

“Of course the direct colorization of the voice is in itself a technical evolution, induced by mental pictures, the quality of the voice changing with the character of the person represented. Thus in Zaza, with the open Italian vowels of the melody line, it is easier to produce a richer fullness of tone. You ask me why Zaza never ‘went over’ before I sang the part? I can only say that it is a rôle which depends altogether on the true, convincing interpretation of the heroine by the

singer. It calls for more than melodrama, there is genuine feeling, genuine emotion underlying the theatric character of Zaza when she realizes what she might have been, confronted by little Toto in the third act, instead of a vulgar hussy! Vocally Zaza makes no conscious demands—I never give the *music* a thought while singing it, so great is the emotional exaltation. I do not like Zaza as a rôle because I am a vocal sluggard, however, but because of its wonderful versatile and dramatic possibilities. And the singer who can make her audience feel that the emotions she is portraying are real, who can make the figure from the libretto live in voice and action, must always carry her part to success.

“The critic, in general, does not seem to understand that this difference in vocal and dramatic characterization is intentional. He looks only for a certain ‘fullness of tone,’ and if it be not forthcoming calls the singer’s voice ‘pallid.’ But the general public seems to be far more instinctive in its response; it feels that this medieval, unsophisticated girl with the blonde hair is very different from the flaming-haired, twentieth-cen-



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tury café-singer, Zaza. About the only critic who understands coloring of the voice and action in opera characterization is Mr. Finck.

“But not alone your voice—your face, your entire personality must be in harmony. You must try to fit your voice to your facial expression—not by mimetic studies before a mirror, but as the result of a real emotional reflex. You must sing, not from the outside, in; but from the inside, out. This should be the starting point of every operatic singer. Calvé was the first to call attention to it by ‘being it,’ and together with Miss Mary Garden and myself, developed the singing actress of the modern repertory.

### CARMEN AND THE GOOSEGIRL

“Two rôles quite as contrasted as those of Marguerite and Zaza are Carmen and the Goosegirl in ‘Königskinder.’ The general idea is that the ideal Carmen must be a swarthy, husky, melodramatic contralto, a real French *opéra comique* singer. Yet no contralto has ever carried this rôle to success. It is the sopranos who have really made Carmen, because in a part which is

less a singing than an acting part, whoever portrays it must weigh less than three hundred pounds; and contraltos, by some hidden law of nature, seem to become superimposing. Carmen, herself, has not so much singing to do; the real vocal work is divided between Don José and Michaela, who is, humanly speaking, the rather colorless foil. Calvé, a high soprano, did wonderful things with this rôle, which is so essentially that of an actress. I think the rôle of Carmen is great fun, because it demands much high animal spirits and pulchritude, and the singer first of all must absolutely look her part, so that every man in the house who sees her will wish to send his card behind the wings. The seduction of the eye must be instantaneous upon her first appearance.

“The Goosegirl, on the other hand, does not know what such a wanton is. She is a lovely, innocent figure from a fairy tale, the embodiment of all that is good and pure. It is not an easy part to sing and act, for the singer must lay aside all her sophistication. It makes no more demands on the voice than Carmen does, but—

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it calls for more vocal color, a different soul. And these prismatic changes in tone color are what give the musical interest to the part. I know of no more charming moments in any opera than those in which the Goosegirl stands on the stage, at the beginning of the second act, with her geese—those few exquisite moments of silence against the web of instrumental music spun by the orchestra—and she sings not a phrase! The power of magnetic conveyance of illusion!

### OTHER INTERESTING OPERATIC RÔLES

“It is hard to say why some operas are successful and others are not. Tosca is a heroine whose real theatric music makes an infallible appeal, it is so rich in emotional tumult, in facile color. Take Massenet, a man who wrote his every score with exquisite finish, and yet poured a stream of wonderful melody right from his heart. His Manon, a charming score, fragrant, delicate, with a delightful plot, and a graceful setting, has never made an appeal; nor has his lovely Werther, heard here very indifferently.

It needed Miss Garden's physical appeal to fill the box office when 'Thaïs' was announced.

"Yet I have scored a most intimate personal success in Puccini's Mimi, in 'Bohème,' and his 'Madame Butterfly,' both more saccharine, musically, and both scores quite different from the exquisiteness of Massenet's art. 'We adore Butterfly,' is the flappers' refrain, and there you are. I am by no means the first or last to present a successful Butterfly. At least two singers vocally my superiors have sung the part. I knew that if I was to make a mark with it, I would have to give my listeners something more than voice—for that my colleagues had already done. So I strove and worked to give them something that went beyond mere vocal expression, which is soul expression. This I feel I have been successful in doing. After singing twenty years it is easier than when beginning, because the experience of singing before people educates the singer who comes to realize that she and her audiences have a soul in common, and that a sincere artistic appeal made to that common gift is seldom made in vain.

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“And as to the singer who wishes to scale the operatic heights, I can say, out of my own experience, that in order to qualify for an operatic career, she must resign herself to sacrifices, must subordinate everything else to her artistic ambition, and distrust herself most when she begins to feel that she has neared perfection. And what she cannot begin to do too early is—to think for herself and not let others do her thinking for her—at any time!”



## AMELITA GALLI-CURCI

AMELITA GALLI-CURCI, the great mistress of coloratura singing, has a personality as well as a voice which charms. In the happiest and most unconstrained fashion, with her flashing smile and an occasional peal of silvery laughter to point a vocal moral, she discussed the art she exemplifies both on the operatic and the concert stage in the sunny reception room of her suite in the Hotel Ambassador in order that those who aspire to sing as she does might profit.

“I am practically self-taught so far as singing is concerned,” she said, “and had already decided to become a concert pianist, had studied under Appiani, and taken a first prize at the Milan Conservatory, before I even thought of doing anything with my voice. Mascagni, a great friend of our family, heard me sing—I was about sixteen—and insisted that it would be almost criminal of me not to develop my voice. But when I took up the study of singing I decided to

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rely upon myself, and if I had defects, to let them be my own defects rather than those a teacher might give me. This does not mean that I do not think there are good teachers, but merely that I chose that way for myself. I read a great deal on the technic of singing and the voice—and applied what I read; Garcia, and especially Lilli Lehmann. To me the latter's book on singing seems the greatest ever written, it is so absolutely complete in every little detail. She is a great artist who really understands all there is to know about the voice, though sometimes I think that only the trained singer can entirely understand her, and draw the fullest benefit from her lessons. I also had records made of my voice, and these showed me where I was at fault. I would study my records with the greatest care, and since my ear, which is very sensitive, would at once seize on any flaws, I thus could correct them at once.

### SECRETS OF COLORATURA SINGING

“Well, if you wish to call them secrets. . . . It all seems quite simple to me. Speaking in the

technical sense, it all boils down to singing without forcing the voice; letting out the breath as it should be let out; never pushing it forth. This is a universal principle of tone production. If you blow more air into a flute than the flute can hold, you get a wheezing and whistling tone. If you force the tone on a violin you begin to scratch. If you listen to Barrère you will hear a full, light quality of tone; there is no forcing it. It is the same with Kreisler or Heifetz; you have pure, beautiful sonorities, there is no suggestion of the strings; and so it should be with the voice.

“I believe there is such a thing as a natural gift for coloratura, for swift, clear and rapid passage and *staccato* singing in the high register. My own voice inclined naturally to coloratura and the *staccato*, and vocal agility has always been easy for me. I found sustained *legato* singing far more difficult, and had to work hard for it. In order to have a fine vocal *staccato* it is absolutely necessary to have a pure attack. None of the great singers of the past who excelled in their art, Tamagno, for instance, slid or ‘scooped’ their tones. Their attack was always

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pure. And the pure attack is a matter of intensive study. [ You must be sure of your tone-placing, your intonation, so sure that you do not have to give it a thought. ] On the violin, which has no keys, the artist has to *feel* his keys in his mind. A poor violinist slides so that you can hear it, while a good violinist never lets you suspect that there are such things as strings.

“When rightly produced, coloratura does not strain the throat; for in singing it, though the throat should be open, there is no reason why the muscles should be strained. I do not believe in the theory that use of the high register tones is dangerous for the voice; that is, proper use of them. In fact, I think the high notes less dangerous than the low ones in this respect. If you can sing scales perfectly in your lower register, coloratura passages should come easily to you. But you cannot develop well-rounded, beautiful high tones without actually practicing them. And how are you going to be sure of them if you practice them *mezza voce*? It is not enough merely to be able to *touch* a high note, you must be able to sustain it, beautifully and brilliantly.

In order to do so you must be able to pass up from the lower register to a few tones *above* the highest you actually have to sing. At home, to be sure of my high E, I make a point of being able to sing a full, well-rounded F or G; then I know my E will sound as it should in opera. Of course the voice must be accustomed to a certain amount of effort, a legitimate amount of it, without straining. And coloratura must be practiced full voice, not *mezza voce*, if you wish to produce a tone which will be heard in a large house. It is very simple; unless you use your vocal cords you will get no tone from them, and if you use them rightly, there is no reason why they should 'wear out' prematurely. As long as they last your coloratura should last.

"My idea of the coloratura tone is one that is not lacking in body, and is of the same beautiful quality as the tone used in sustained passages.

### THE "COVERED" VOICE

"Observation, not imitation, can teach every singer much, for all musical sound and all methods of producing it should interest the real musi-



cian. Take the birds, for instance. Their tone-producing apparatus is quite different from that of human beings, and yet some of them produce a tone which, in a way, is perfect. I know that I have always enjoyed listening to our nightingales in the Italian Alps. They are wonderful singers, with a beautiful 'covered' tone, not a thick, but a concentrated tone, rather dark in quality. To me there is always just that difference between the song of the nightingale and other bird song that there is between the singer who has the same quality of human tone, and singers who lack it. Covered singing is the only singing which really deserves the name. It is not produced by a closed throat. To achieve it the throat must not be closed, and there must be just the right mixture of sounds of a bright and of a dark vowel quality. And this beautiful 'covered' voice carries much further than the voice which is too shrill. And then it is so expressive; it has such a lovely quality of pathos. To me it is the ideal tone, and explains why we singers are so often compared to nightingales.

### TONE PRODUCTION

“The right way to produce tone is to get as close to nature in the process as possible. Nature has simple, direct, infallible methods which we are only too apt to distort with our fertile imaginations. Ease is the great principle of good tone production, an ease which must become second nature in course of time. Yet a knowledge of mechanical processes is absolutely necessary. For, on occasion, the singer may not feel well, and yet have to sing. On such occasions it is well to have technical and mechanical knowledge upon which to fall back.

### BREATH CONTROL

“Breath control is really just a matter of breathing naturally. The ribs must be kept widely spread; then the diaphragm must be drawn down. And, what is very important, the breath must not be exhaled *directly* against the vocal cords. Push the breath against the chest and—controlling it with the chest—send it out against the cords. And do not hold back the

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breath which is to be expelled, for if you do you will tire your muscles.

### PRACTICE HINTS

“For tone production and voice placing, slow singing of exercises to insure cleanliness and precision must be the foundation; more rapid tempos in practice come later. If the voice be well placed it need not be forced. A fine carrying voice does not call for a big physique”—Mme. Galli-Curci herself has proven conclusively that this is a fact—“and a well-placed tone of clean, concentrated quality will sound above any orchestra. A canary’s voice (for instance, merely to show that physical bulk or volume of tone is of no importance compared with quality), if placed high enough, would carry above an orchestra.

“I keep my voice flexible by singing long scales slowly in sustained notes, then quick scales, both *legato* and *staccato*, and by practicing trills on every note of the scale. It takes endurance, but is very strengthening for the voice. I do this every day, rain or shine, when I am singing in opera or in concert. And, though you may not

believe it, I actually enjoy starting the day with this work. In all, I practice, perhaps, one to two hours a day, a half hour to an hour at a time. Students should practice ten to fifteen minutes at a time.

### “WHITE” TONES AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

“ ‘White’ tones are useless to the singer, because song is a medium of expression; every tone is part of the expressional charm and beauty of the phrase or passage to which it belongs, and as the ‘white’ tones do not express anything, they are valueless. When you find that your tones are inclined to be ‘white,’ try when producing them to judiciously mix with your notes a little special vowel quality—*ôo* or *o*—to make the tone darker, more expressive. This can be done by using the scales as a practicing medium. In general, it is possible to get the most valuable results by singing the various vowels—*a, e, i, o, u*—each singly, up and down the scale.

### OPERA SINGING AND CONCERT SINGING

“Speaking for myself, I should say that singing on the concert stage is especially interesting

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for the opera singer because it offers a répertoire quite different from the dramatic one, and thus makes for variety. Then, in the songs she sings, the concert singer, as a rule, does not have to exert the same amount of voice power as in opera. Of course, when singing an opera aria on the concert platform, I use the same amount of vocal fullness that I do when singing it in opera, even though I have only a piano accompaniment. In the first place it is a matter of temperament and again, in the coloratura aria, there is not so great a difference between an orchestral and a piano accompaniment as might be supposed. As a rule the orchestra merely supplies foundation cords of one kind or another to support the flow of the fioriture passages. I am very fortunate in my accompanist in concert work—not because he is my husband—but because he is a wonderfully accomplished musician, a master of artistic detail at the piano. I might almost say that in our concert work we breathe together.

“To me concert singing is like pastel painting, and opera work like painting in oils. In opera you can use all those big, broad strokes of the



vocal brush—even though they may not be delicate in detail at times—which the more finished art of the concert stage does not allow. Then, too, in concert the singer presents a vocal picture without a frame; its beauties stand out more clearly, but it is also easier to analyze defects. In opera you have a magnificent decorative and orchestral frame which helps many an artist hide her defects by making them less apparent.

### IMAGINATION AND TECHNIC

“When it comes to studying opera rôles and individual songs for recital use the process is at bottom the same. First comes the purely technical, and then you ‘dress’ your music with your imagination. This gives color and emotion—for without imagination the singer is lost, no matter how good her voice may be. In fact, if one had to choose between the two, it would be better to have less technic and more imagination, rather than more technic and less imagination, for the latter lends its life, spirit and feeling to music.

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## GESTURE IN CONCERT

“While dramatics, acting, is one of the first essentials in opera singing, gestures to me seem quite out of place on the concert stage. Concert singing is intimate singing, and color should be lent the songs by means of vocal inflection and facial expression, not by movements of the body and hands. To me these do not seem right, nor does it look well. Even in the operatic aria, gesture seems uncalled for on the concert stage. I do not have to rage about the stage when I sing the ‘Mad Scene’ from ‘Lucia’ to convey the impression that Lucia was a maniac. Facial expression, the manner in which I sing the music should depict her as she is—and poor Lucia was the gentlest kind of a maniac, anyway!

## THE AUDIENCE

“Frankly, I feel it my duty to give pleasure, not to ‘educate’ the public. There are enough singers who develop the educational idea on the concert stage with heavy programs whose lack of general interest the small size of their audiences

often prove. By this I do not mean that I sing a program of trifles. But there is plenty of sane, beautiful music, simple, healthy and appealing, songs which people love to hear—and, without any false modesty, I might mention that they will fill the Hippodrome to hear me sing them. I do not neglect the American composer in making up my programs; not because he is the American composer, but because American composers have written some very charming songs, and for that reason I can always make up an American group which is interesting and will give pleasure.

### THE INDISPENSABILITY OF WORK

“Hard work is the one thing with which the singer cannot dispense. I work all through the summer, preparing new opera rôles or older rôles I expect to sing during the season. Last summer I went over all the rôles I am singing this year in Chicago and in New York. In Chicago I look forward especially to the title rôle in Massenet’s ‘Manon Lescaut,’ with its fine coloratura gavotte and its effective pathetic and dramatic moments. And for New York I prepared the rôles of

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Madame Butterfly, Bohème, and various others among my 'war horses.'

"In the summer, too, I go over large heaps of new songs for my next season's programs together with my husband, up in the mountains, the most ideal place to work. For I do not believe that much rest is good for the voice. I think too many students and singers, once they have reached a certain point, consider it quite safe to just 'go along' without much exertion. Yet this neglect always shows. The voice grows hard and rusty. The singer cannot let herself get out of training, no more than an athlete can.

"And in connection with intensive work, are some practical points the singer may well bear in mind. I do not believe in worrying about colds. A little cold may easily irritate the throat muscles, yet it seems useless to take too many special precautions. I always sleep with my windows wide open—even when the temperature is below zero—and I consider fresh air the best tonic for the voice. Drafts, of course, are dangerous; but I walk in the open every day, an hour as a rule, and I believe that constant open-air

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breathing hardens the voice and offers the best protection against colds. I think I have a right to believe this, because in the course of four years I have only missed two engagements because of illness.

“How the artist who takes her voice and her art seriously can deliberately spend late hours where she will have to irritate her voice speaking in a smoky atmosphere, in restaurants, etc., I cannot understand. Early to bed, exercise in the open air, a good walk and a good rest, several hours’ sleep before a performance, and you really have something to give your audience.”









MABEL GARRISON

## MABEL GARRISON

MABEL GARRISON, as one of our most representative American coloratura sopranos, with a splendid record of achievement both in opera and in concert—whose *Violetta*, *Queen of the Night* and *Michaëla*, and many a recital appearance are undoubtedly a pleasurable memory for readers of this book—gives some interesting practical hints and viewpoints which should benefit the student of singing. As she told the writer, however, the facts she has stated are those which have been impressed upon her in connection with her own work, and naturally, they apply only to herself. They are, however, so generally pertinent as to deserve serious consideration.

### HOW TO STUDY

“I do not think a student can get very far without taking her work seriously and concentrating on it. I suppose this is one of the things which any successful singer is apt to say, but I

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know it to be a fact in my own experience, and at a time when many take serious study too lightly, there can be no harm in repeating it. Long singing hours, so far as I can see, are never beneficial. They are too fatiguing mentally for the student. One short period—say from twenty minutes to half an hour—of *hard* application is worth more than a whole day of bad singing.

### ERRORS TO AVOID

“The first things which I think every singer should avoid are imitation and affectation. Every one has an individuality of one kind or another. But the thing to do is to develop that originality; it is your own. Do not try to model yourself, in externals (for this is usually as far as imitation can get) on some other singer who has been successful, who has made her reputation on her *own* individuality, and not because she patterned after some one else.

### VOCAL HABITS WORTH CULTIVATING

“A singer must cultivate the habit of being prepared, of being absolutely ready for what she



is going to sing. The singer who gets into the habit of leaving things to 'the inspiration of the moment,' is apt to find, some day, that while the moment is at hand the 'inspiration' is missing. Never, never leave anything to chance! This applies especially to opera singers, so many of whom never prepare the details of a rôle until they are on the stage.

"In concert singing, what we know as 'personality' is one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest of assets. Personality comprises all that collection of attributes which go to make up the nature and character of a person; and if the person be an artist, the nature and character of her art. It is a very vague and intangible thing to define. But the concert singer *must* have it. She must produce a distinct individual impression on her audience. She must not step out on the stage and look and sing like any one else. She must strike a distinct personal note, in manner as well as in singing. 'Personality' may be cultivated to a certain extent, and the surest way to do it, is for the artist to *love* her audiences, and to become 'one of them.'

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“I have never, during my entire career, applied myself *hours* at a time to my work! On the other hand, on finishing lessons, I have often ached from head to foot as a result of *mental* strain; while *vocally* I have been as fresh as when I started.

### VOCAL EXERCISES

“Well, to my thinking, it is almost impossible to say definitely which vocal exercises a student should use, and with which she may dispense. There are so many various types of voices, so many students variously gifted, so many individual vocal needs and necessities, that I shrink from any specification. Besides, any number of well-known vocal authorities have written whole books about vocal exercise, and what to use, without success—that is, so far as any *practical* value to the student is concerned. Every single student needs different exercises. No two voices are alike, any more than are two thumb prints; and the exercises which may have helped me might harm some one else. As a matter of fact, I have found it necessary to change my vocal exer-

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cises from time to time, according to my changing voice needs, for the needs of the voice have a habit of altering their nature.

“To return for a moment to the concert singer. So many American girls study for the recital and concert stage that I would like, before closing, to stress once more what I have said anent the singer’s personality as a great asset for success. It is a difficult thing to express clearly in words, but the more the singer can make her audience feel that she not alone likes them, but that they are ‘home folks’ to her, that she thinks as they do and feels as they do, the more powerfully will they be drawn to her and her art. All things being equal, I should say that an audience will respond to the appeal of ‘personality’ on the singer’s part in the same degree that the singer makes them feel that she is altogether ‘one of them.’ The worst thing in the world to do and the one which most quickly alienates the sympathy of an audience, is for the singer to sing ‘down’ to her listeners.”



## URSULA GREVILLE

URSULA GREVILLE, the English coloratura soprano whose very successful concerts in England, on the Continent and in America have gained her a distinguished place on the modern recital stage, spoke straight to the point on many phases of her art when the writer was privileged to talk with her in her New York hotel. Miss Greville, incidentally, is the editor of "The Sackbut"—surely a unique instance of artistic duality on the part of a singer.

"I make no claim to prima-donnaship," said Miss Greville, "although I made my début in Covent Garden as the Queen of the Night. But, if I do say so myself, I have a phenomenal range, and to be able to sing from the D in the bass to the G in alt, is quite as useful on the concert as on the opera stage. I love my concert work, yet I still feel that I should like to do opera. I can act, and when I sang Michaëla in 'Carmen,'



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one critic said that it was the first time he had ever noticed there was a Michaëla on the stage. Yet no singer can do good work on the concert or opera stage unless she have a knowledge of psychology. In concert singing, especially, every song is an individual problem. Each has its appropriate gestures—no, I would not say gestures, but rather motions, unobtrusive attitudes of body, hands and head—which bring out its character and meaning. There is not a song which does not have its own scheme of motion, so to speak, and its psychological application to the feelings, the social and occupational outlook, the type reactions of different audiences greatly aids the singer in making a real appeal.

### ESTABLISHING THE KEYNOTE OF A SONG

“Most concert singers fail to draw the man in the street. They sing on a plane above him and do not make him feel at home with the music. And in many songs you have to make the impression you want, to fix it absolutely, *before* you actually begin to sing. Even before the opening measures of the piano introduction the audience

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must be gripped. I have been singing, for example, a song by Owen Mase, 'There Is No More to Say'—a song whose keynote is absolute dejection and despair. [ This feeling I must establish by the attitude of my body, my facial expression, my whole personality, before I begin to sing, so as to conquer the entire sympathy of my audience, to make it *ready* to thrill to the music when the latter begins. [ Try to establish the keynote of each individual song before you sing it. [ The concert singer should be willing, if necessary, to spend a year on a song to get it absolutely perfect, so that she can sing it standing on her head, if necessary.

### THIRTY TEACHERS

"My mother, who was a Marchesi pupil, was my first teacher. Later they wanted to turn me into a big-voiced singer, and wanted me to force my high notes to that end—but I would not. I think that it is better for any girl to have a small voice of beautiful quality rather than a big, screechy one. I know Dan Godfrey, when I sang for him in a large auditorium, once surprised

me by saying that he had been told my voice was small, but that it filled the hall. And a small voice which is *clear* will travel further and fill a hall more resonantly than a big, shrill voice—the latter will not carry. Teachers? I have had many since I began studying with my mother. Before my tour here I gave an evening party which brought together some thirty teachers—from all of whom I had gained something, for I believe in studying with any person who has specialized in any subject whatever. If a man should have specialized in early Italian music, surely it will save valuable time to study with him instead of with a person whose interests are more general. A specialist can put his finger on the material likely to be of interest to you, and then you can go back and study it with your teacher of production. I may be wrong, but I believe it to be necessary to study with a master until the day you stop singing—for no singer can hear her own voice and little mistakes creep in without being noticed. I remember how pleasant it was to hear these thirty teachers all saying to each other, ‘Yes, I gave her this’ or ‘I gave her that,’ all

without any jealousy or ill-feeling. Whenever anything seems wrong with your voice, try and find out at once what it is. There is a kind of fear so deep that one is afraid to ask people who really know, in case one should be told the truth. But there is a golden rule. If anything is difficult to sing, after having spent the necessary thought and preparation on a song, then you are certainly singing wrongly, for good singing is easy singing. And I know, for it has happened in my own case, that if one only has the courage to face failures, and there will be many in a public career, and look at them not as failures but as experiences to be turned into successes later on—then nothing can prevent your realizing your ambition. Three years ago, before my *début*, a very honest friend of mine said to me: ‘Ursula, your voice is not as lovely this year as it was last.’ She was right, I had been forcing my tones. So I went to Field Hyde, in London, who helped me greatly. Since my return from my German tour I have been studying with Signor Alfredo Morelli, son of a famous Chilian doctor, a wonderful teacher, famous in Milan,

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whose knowledge of psychology is as great as his knowledge of the voice.

### DICTION

“Diction I studied with Plunkett Greene. Too many singers on the concert stage to-day do not enunciate, it seems to me. And it is so important. No singer should sing at a recital in such a way that people have to crane their necks to hear her. After one of my recent London recitals a man came back to the dressing room where I was resting, very tired after the concert and said: ‘Miss Greville, I want that shilling back!’ I had no idea what he could be talking about until he added, ‘They made me pay a shilling for a word-book and I never had occasion to use it.’ Some songs are very difficult with regard to enunciation. Armstrong Gibbs has written a song, ‘The Mad Prince,’ whose ‘mad’ words are very hard to put across. I had my secretary take down the words from my singing and her transcript showed me that she had not made them out. But I was not discouraged. I kept on practicing them and when I made a



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second attempt, with another stenographer, they were set down correctly. Then I knew that they would be heard and understood when I sang them in public.

“I do not understand how a singer can come forward to sing without knowing whether the words she is singing will be heard. The first thing I did when I came out on the platform of a big mission one afternoon in the East End, one of the worst districts in London, was to ask my audience to tell me when I had finished my song, whether or no they could hear me. And when they shouted ‘Yis, we ’eard yer!’ at the end of the song, then I knew I had nothing more to fear. Unless people know what you are singing about they cannot enjoy the music, especially in the case of modern songs, where the poem is all-important.

### PRACTICE

“No, I do not use many *vocalises* or exercises. To what end? If I want to flex my voice I take up Stravinsky’s ‘Nightingale’ song, or the ‘wordless’ song, ‘Aurora,’ by Egon Wellesz, which he

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wrote especially for me, and which I have been singing here in the United States. For that matter, it seems more useful and more direct to me to practice the difficulties of any song rather than exercises. And if you have the patience, aside from the voice, you can sing even the hardest words on high notes. In one of my songs the composer brings the word 'God's' on an E in alt, and the words 'I am happy,' descending, on the D, C and B flat respectively. The vowel is short, the note very high and yet, by working a few minutes a day, every day, on the vowel alone, and then adding the initial and later the ending consonants, I found I could sing the word clearly. But this placing of difficult words on high notes in songs is not necessary. The high range is essentially a coloratura, not a word range. On the other hand, it should be possible to perfect one's technic so that it will meet any demand, though I have not done so myself to my own satisfaction.

"I practice three or four hours a day when I am not concertizing. When I am singing in concert I practice an hour and a half a day with

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my accompanist. I will take some difficult coloratura measures of the Queen of the Night rôle, or other songs of the kind I have mentioned, and work at them for half an hour, *mezza voce*. This helps me more than any exercises, I believe. I study all my new songs mentally, score in hand, before I ever sing a syllable of their music. But I never touch the interpretation of the poem until I have absolutely 'gotten' the music. And I never cease practicing my programs, building them up, perfecting them, trying to develop new beauties of detail and expression. Do you know, I do my best exercise practicing in my bath? At seven-thirty in the morning on my working days I sing my trills and scales there and—probably because there are no pictures in a bathroom and the resonance is good—they usually sound well to me.

### CONCERT AND OPERA STAGE

"One has to be fifty times the artist on the concert stage that one is in opera. It is so much easier to sing in opera. In recital a little song calls for restraint, *mezza voce* quality, and a voice

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liquid enough to carry for miles. There you stand, just yourself, with no big orchestra to hide your mistakes, no gorgeous scenery to set off your personality. Concert singing really calls for great technic and great art. The opera singer often has broader and easier effects. An opera singer can hold a high note as long as the orchestra is willing to wait. But if she has some delicate shading to do, running from *piano* to *pianissimo*, she cannot indicate it above an orchestra of seventy or eighty musicians. My own idea is that in these days there is not enough study, not enough rehearsing, either in concert or in opera.

### THE FROCK AS A FACTOR IN RECITAL SUCCESS

“But aside from the concert singer’s voice and personality, she has—if she chooses to make use of it—another factor at hand which may aid greatly in her success—the frock! I mean by this the right frock for the right song or group of songs. The singer’s frock is very valuable in helping her make clear the meaning of her songs,

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in lending them charm of local color, and giving a touch of appropriate beauty of color and design to their interpretation. I was told of a man who went to one of my London concerts, a man who knew nothing about music and cared less, and who after I had sung a few songs said. 'Why, that girl is no singer! She's a revue artist. Hope she'll keep right on for a long time.' It was a sincere compliment, coming from him. And what drew it forth?—the frock.

"Music is not as interesting to some people who attend concerts as to others, but if they can be prevented from finding it dull by having something beautiful to look at while they listen, they may in the end be led to like it more and more. It seems so stupid to see a woman who sings away about spring, spring which is so fresh, and green and delicately joyous, in a gown of flaming red brocade. How can she make her audience feel that she is expressing the mood of her song? I think it is just as legitimate for the artist to support and embellish her song with beauty of dress, in the way of design, color and historic or regional suggestion, as she does with her piano



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accompaniment, the natural movement of her hands and body, and facial expression.

“Here,” continued the singer, “let me show you some of my frocks—I have more than sixty of them—all designed by me.” Miss Greville’s maid, undoing their tissue paper wrappings, reverently brought forth a number of exquisite creations which fully bore out the artist’s contentions anent the charm a lovely frock has for the eye. “This,” continued Miss Greville, as she held up a lovely thing in gold, Russian greens and blues, with a dull gold buckle heavily studded with uncut rubies, “this is my frock when I sing ‘The Hymn to the Sun’ from Rimsky’s ‘Coq d’Or.’ Is it not beautiful? And the buckle—I should not want to tell you what it cost for it comes from a famous collection of antiques and is as old as the hills,” she added with a little sigh. “This other”—it was a gossamer thing of soft shades of rich blues and silver—“is my ‘Moonlight’ frock. I am very fond of it because I used it in England on the stage to try out my theories with regard to frocks as factors in winning success in concert singing, and it justified itself.

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I use it for songs with a distinct atmospheric quality, a 'moonlight' quality of appeal, soft, clear, cool songs whose charm lies in the silver clarity of their melodies rather than in any sentiment of warmth or passion. This almost early Victorian frock—its design is really older, however—I use for groups of Elizabethan songs. Some little time back I sang a group of songs accompanied by the lute, probably the first time the lute had been used in public for many generations, and for that I wore a little white velvet stomacher and full skirt. I never bother to get the exact period frock for in those days I'm sure there were women who refused to follow fashion, and altered the period frocks, just as they do to-day. It is the suggestion which counts. To begin with, it would be impossible to sing in many of the garments owing to the restriction. I could spend hours on this subject, which I believe to be a most important factor in getting the man in the street interested visually as well as aurally.

“There is one thing I would like to say: In starting out on a career remember there are singers who have studied years before you were

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thought of—therefore give them your homage. Don't try to belittle their work in the vain hope it makes your work seem better, for it doesn't. When members of the singing profession are as loyal to each other as they are to their scales, then singers will be regarded with the respect their art demands but their personality rarely obtains. A wonderfully happy rule is to try to be instrumental in getting another singer a job, as you fare along your singing path; you are laying up for yourself a happiness greater than that which the money you might have grabbed could possibly bring you. After all, money is not everything; but whatever your nature is, remember it must come through your singing, so make quite sure just what you want to have mirrored for 'by your friends shall ye be known.' ”

Yet, as if to show that her “singing personality,” in the last analysis, is not dependent on any frock, Miss Greville gave the writer on his departure the charming picture here reproduced, which shows her in an evening gown.





FRIEDA HEMPEL



## FRIEDA HEMPEL

FRIEDA HEMPEL, the brilliant coloratura soprano who enjoys the distinction of being one of the few *prime donne* of her kind who combine supremacy in the coloratura field with the temperament of the dramatic singer, and who is so equally and admirably at home on the operatic and recital stage, has another quality which marks the truly great artist. She is generously willing to pass on to ambitious students of singing, and especially opera singing, some of the lessons gleaned from her own rich store of experience. During an informal chat in a quiet corner of the tea room of the St. Regis Hotel she dropped many valuable artistic and practical hints which the writer, who was privileged to talk with her, has set down for those who sing.

### THE FIRST STUDY YEAR

"I had really started out to become a concert pianist," said Miss Hempel, "when I found out

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that I had a voice and began to sing scales with my vocal cords instead of my fingers. Out of my own experience I should say that tone production and the building up of tone are the foundation of vocal life, and that the singer's first study year should be given up to tone-building exercises—no songs, but mechanical exercises pure and simple. Then, of course, *solfeggios* and *vocalises*. It is not so much a question of *whose vocalises* are used (though some are far better than others) as *how* they are used. I was an ambitious girl, and when I studied with Mme. Niklass-Kempner in Berlin—she was a wonderful exponent of the old Italian *bel canto* principles—I concentrated and worked—worked hard. I worked, worked, worked! I worked during the regular study months and then, when summer came, instead of dropping my work, I went right on. It is no exaggeration when I say that during the summer months I sang my scales literally thousands of times, sang them with energy, day after day, listening for the full, rounded tone. I think the girl student should have a woman teacher to place her voice—a teacher whose own singing

voice is not worn out, and who can show her how to produce and build up tone by imitation, which is the most direct and natural way to learn how to sing in the earlier study period. First of all the tone has to be built up; then it can be developed technically.

### THE STAFF OF VOCAL LIFE

“The singer’s everyday companion, whether she be an opera singer or a concert singer—there is no reason why, if she is intelligent and adaptable, she cannot be both—should be the scale. I keep up my scale work, my technical work every day: It is not wise for any singer to tell herself ‘I know my rôle or my program!’ The throat is a delicate organ; some little constraint in flexibility, some little muscular weakness may develop, which the bracing routine of daily exercise would have prevented; so, every morning, I run through my scales and breathing exercises. I should feel guilty if I neglected them. If the student will sing scales softly and evenly, striving for long, sustained tones, she is using the right method to secure the beautiful *legato* which is the basis of

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beautiful song. Scale work gives vocal lightness and sureness, and is the true secret of gaining breath control. If a Brünnhilde can sing a beautiful coloratura scale her rôle will be all the better sung because of it.

### PERFECT TONE AND THE REGISTER

“Once the singer’s notes are firmly fixed in her voice, once her breath control is established, comes free and unconstrained movement within her vocal range—I prefer the word range to ‘register’ or ‘registers,’ so often used, because ‘registers’ are really only arbitrary divisions of a naturally continuing range. Continuous practice in interval singing, leaping from a low to a high tone and *vice versa*, carrying out every possible ‘jump,’ should not present any terrifying difficulties if the scales have been logically developed in the voice. I have been told that some teachers claim that there is a break in the voice, between F and F sharp and G, which is difficult to bridge. I have never found this to be the case, and I believe the difficulty of passing from one part of the singer’s natural vocal range to another is largely

one of imagination. Provided her tone placing has been developed as it ought to have been, this difficulty should not exist. Of course, some singers have a more extended range than others. When I left the Berlin Conservatoire, for instance, I sang the F sharp above the F sharp in the third octave in the upper 'register,' and ranged down to the A below middle C, a range which I still possess.

### TRILLS NOT GOD-GIVEN

"No doubt there are singers who have what is known as a 'natural trill,' but the perfect trill is not God-given; in the case of the girl student it must be woman-made. [ Endless practice, slow practice, singing softly, with the ear alert to notice any deviation from even quality and even duration in tone, is the only manner by which the perfect trill can be acquired. Once the student has succeeded in equalizing her voice so that she is absolutely sure that it is even, the trill may be sung *forte*. But she must never forget to listen attentively, with the ear on guard as before,



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against any falling away from tonal equality or duration.

### SONGS AND VOCALISES FOR THE SECOND YEAR

“During the first year of study the singer has been concentrating on learning how to *do* things and do them in the right way. In the second year she should learn *why* she does them. Simple songs, songs such as Mozart’s ‘Veilchen’ and the lovely Mozart ‘Lullaby’ should be taken up and studied during the second year. And this, too, is the year during which the student should perfect her diction. This insistence on a step by step progression need not be at all monotonous if the student is really ambitious, and continues to make a concentrated study of tone and its perfect production and control. She will find it the most interesting thing in the world to watch the course of her own development in this direction. As regards *vocalises*, there are three sets in particular which I think every coloratura soprano should know: those by Bordogni, Concone and Lütgen. By the end of her second year—if the student has

*faithfully* followed out her routine of tone building, scales *legato* and *staccato*—vocal skips and leaps and trills, she should be singing these *vocalises* perfectly. There are also excellent *vocalises* by Marchesi and Garcia, which with some of the old Italian *vocalises*, are well worth using. Once the singer has perfected herself in the Bordogni, Concone and Lütgen *vocalises*, however, she is ready to attempt the older Italian arias. In general I do not believe in unalterably fixed durations of time for practice. Let the student practice anywhere from ten to twenty minutes in succession and then make a break. Sometimes, however, the singer may feel just like working for an hour or more with occasional resting spells and, if so, there is no reason why she should not.

### VALUE OF OBSERVATION

“I am a great believer in the value of observation. Every student of singing can learn by watching other singers and her fellow students. In Berlin there were twenty or thirty girls in my class, and I made it my business to watch and

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listen to them with attention when they were singing. Many a valuable hint they gave me, quite unconsciously, of how to do and—how *not* to do this, that or the other. And later, when she is actually singing on the stage, let the artist watch her colleagues. Caruso was a wonderful teacher when he sang in grand opera, and any singer could profit by his art. When I sang with Caruso I always watched his manner of using his voice, his gestures, his acting, and always found that I had gained knowledge worth possessing, for he was a very great artist.

### THE STUDY OF AN OPERATIC RÔLE

“Singing opera is not, primarily, a matter of knowing rôles. When I sang for the first time on the operatic stage the only rôles I knew were the arias of the Queen of the Night, in Mozart’s ‘Magic Flute.’ Yes, those were my only rôles. But—I never had any trouble learning new rôles, for all I had to do was to concentrate on the interpretation of the part, the music usually offered no great difficulties because my voice had become, through consistent and intensive study, a per-

fect instrument upon which I could rely. When I have a new rôle to learn, I play the score of the opera at the piano: then I have an idea of the whole work. After that I first follow my entire part through the whole score, singing *ensembles* and all, and not until then do I begin to study the separate arias individually. If the student will only think of an opera as a whole, and not merely interest herself in her own part, she will sing the latter much better. She may have her favorites, of course, but let them be favorite operas, not operatic rôles! The acting out, the stage business of an operatic rôle should never be practiced before a mirror, but singing always must be. For facial expression, not only in opera but on the concert stage as well, is very important. Garcia always advocated singing before a mirror. It is very easy for the singer to drop into the habit of singing out of one side of her mouth, or grimacing or raising her eyebrows when she is concentrating on learning a part, unless she has a corrective in the way of a mirror. The last thing an opera singer should do is to sing more with her face than her throat. On the

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other hand, the study of pose and gesture before the mirror makes for constraint. I always feel that any study of that kind before a mirror would make me appear stiff and unnatural on the stage. I believe the audience can always tell when a singer has studied her rôle before a mirror.

### THE COLORATURA VOICE AND RÔLES

“There is no reason why the coloratura singer should restrict herself to purely coloratura rôles, if others as well lie within her vocal range and temperamental ability. Any good coloratura singer should be able to sing such lyric parts as Manon and Madame Butterfly, or even the more difficult but lyrically soulful Eva in the ‘Meister-singer’; just as the dramatic singer should have some idea of coloratura. Of course, some dramatic singers think that temperament is all that is needed to make a dramatic rôle convincing. They either will not or cannot produce a smooth, beautiful *legato*. But there is nothing that will take the place of a beautiful *cantabile* tone. Violetta in ‘La Traviata’ is a rôle dear to my heart, dramatically and vocally. I found the



greatest pleasure in studying it, and never before had I been so thankful for the endless scales and 'jumps' and trills that left me free to put all my heart and soul into the tone-coloring of the arias. Just singing the notes, the music is delightful. Putting into the score all the shades of emotion that surge through it; pouring all the despair, love, hope, joy and sorrow into the tones of the fragile heroine, who is continually pulling at our heart-strings—the possibilities of the song seem to reach into overtones of rare beauty. It is a rôle that takes a great hold on me, leaves me listless, tired—emotionally exhausted. Yet my voice seems to revel in it—to thrive on the freedom and opportunity of expressing itself. Violetta is lyric in the main, yet has coloratura opportunities, and I always look on it as really belonging to the coloratura repertoire for that reason. But on the other hand there are rôles which do not seem adapted. My voice, for instance, is too light, clear and silvery for Isolda; and Tosca, though a rôle which I have often sung, is not a rôle for me.

“But the specific coloratura repertoire is rich

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in beautiful rôles. Lucia in 'Lucia di Lammermoor' is a very effective one. Yet the great 'Mad Scene,' with its wealth of trills and roulades running up and down and up again, is too often spoiled by a poor histrionic presentation. A singer will come on the stage and just stand and sing it woodenly. Now poor Lucia is insane, and if while she is singing her aria that fact is not made apparent by appropriate action and gesture, a good deal of the effect of the song is lost. Head and heart must be used in presenting a rôle as well as a voice. Gertrude in Leo Blech's 'Versiegelt' is an interesting rôle which I created in Europe. In this country I created the rôle of the Feldmarschallin in Richard Strauss' 'Rosenkavalier.' Strauss told me he had really written the score for me, and offered me my choice of the three leading parts—Sophie, Feldmarschallin and Octavian—and at length I chose Feldmarschallin—a distinguished, elegant, rococo figure, aristocratic and piquant—that is, if she is properly *acted* as well as sung by the singer. You know the story of the opera, and how easy it would be to vulgarize this dainty, eighteenth-

century *grande dame* by overemphasis or misreading of her type. The music is difficult to learn, like much of the modern music, because the voice has very little orchestral support; and there is too much *parlando* singing in it, which is anything but good for the voice, as it destroys its sweetness and lusciousness. One cannot let the tone flow properly and string one round, luscious tone on another along the thread of the melodic line in the *parlando*.

“When Strauss wrote ‘*Ariadne auf Naxos*,’ he planned the rôle of Zerbinetta for me, and wrote in a high F sharp especially for my voice. I went to Garmich and studied the rôle with him there. And then, when I knew it by heart, I was so unfortunate as to get laryngitis and could not sing it at Stuttgart, though Strauss almost got down on his knees to persuade me to. In the actual study of all rôles I think the principles I have already mentioned hold good. First the singer must be sure of her *tone*, and once sure of that the technical difficulties are almost nonexistent. A perfect tone the singer can color and modify at will to suit the individual character

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whom she is representing in her music. The opera singer who can sing Mozart can sing Strauss, but the *tessitura* of her voice must be properly adjusted to Mozart's high coloratura range.

### OPERA VERSUS CONCERT SINGING

"I enjoy my concert work, perhaps, even more than my opera work," said Miss Hempel. "In some ways it is more difficult. But, again, as I see it, it is not a question of whether the artist is an 'opera' or a 'recital' singer—but first of all whether she is an artist. On the operatic stage singing is done on a broad style in which details and *finesse* are often lost; the singer usually has the support of the orchestra to cover up mistakes or an accidental vocal weakness, and is not so dependent on herself as on the concert platform. On the other hand, in opera the singer has a tendency to force her voice, to sing more heavily and powerfully in order to make head against the tremendous volume of the orchestral tone. Opera singing can never attain the artistic refinement and intimacy of concert singing. What the opera

singer must do when singing on the concert stage is simply to adjust her voice to the changed requirements. There, too, the coloratura soprano may sing songs which she never could present in opera. But there are too many distinctions drawn between 'operatic songs' and other songs. There are independent songs which are just as dramatic as any included in an opera score, and others which are just as lyric. And there are distinctive coloratura arias from operas which can be presented with the greatest effect in recital with piano accompaniment. I shall not mention any special opera songs which are adapted for recital work, because you need only consult my programs to see which I sing; and in general I believe every singer should use her own brains in selecting the songs which are best suited to her voice, her temperament and her stage presence. Perfect tone, shading, vocal quality all stand out at their best in recital singing, and aside from a natural adjustment of the voice to the requirements of the individual concert hall, the singer should sing a song in concert just as she would sing it in opera. After all, every song



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is more or less a character study, and this is worth while for every student to remember when she projects it.

### HOW TO BECOME A PRIMA DONNA

“Probably many other singers have told you the selfsame thing I am about to say, but I know no magic way to become an opera singer. No matter how great the natural talent—work, hard work, endless work, is the only way. It all comes to that in the end. Do not believe that you can learn singing from your canary, as one singer claims. It is a picturesque idea, but there is nothing to it. I sometimes think American girls do not realize how important is plain, simple, everyday hard work along the lines I have indicated. One cannot do justice to a round of social duties and engagements and expect to squeeze in enough practicing to become a *prima donna*. And yet, in the United States, the hard-working and ambitious student, once she has shown her quality, can count on the most loyal and devoted public in the world. That surely is a real incentive to strive and persevere. I know that if

I had not been ambitious and not persevered, I would never have been a real singer. And the genuine artist knows one thing: she must not stop and try to rest on her laurels. If she does, she will find that they are apt to wither, crumble away, and disappear. In no field of artistic activity in this day is competition keener than in the operatic world, and even where there is a great natural talent, it cannot be brought to its fulfillment in artistic success without constant application. Remember, too, that there is more in singing than singing. It is a big, broad, human art. Yet for it to reach its perfect development implies the sacrifice of other interests, and the hardest kind of hard study in order to acquire the technical and musical equipment necessary. The student can dispense with a teacher, she even *should* do so eventually, for the time is sure to come when she must rely on her own self and her own initiative. A singer, though, should never go long without a coach—some one to *watch* her work and always keep her up to concert pitch. But no matter how great the teacher, how dis-

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cerning the coach, the result will always depend upon herself—she can never dispense with hard work and study, with ideals and ambitions—not while she wishes to make a name as a singer.”





LOUISE HOMER



## LOUISE HOMER

LOUISE HOMER is one of the few great contraltos whose work is as remarkable for its artistry and beauty on the recital as on the operatic stage. As an American artist who has achieved the most distinguished success, her personal views of various phases of her art may well be pondered by the budding contralto. For Madame Homer, when she was kind enough to receive the writer in her New York home, discussed them with vivid directness and clear conviction.

### THE CONTRALTO RÔLES IN OPERA

“Now do not ask me whether I like the contralto voice best. It would be like asking me whether I cared for my children or my home. As I happen to be a contralto, contralto is the voice for me, and I cannot help being prejudiced in its favor. Yet, even if I were not a contralto, I

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think I might say that the alto tone touches the heart, it is moving and affecting, although the soprano is much more showy and effective.

“Of course, in opera most of the contralto rôles (characters) are quite unsympathetic. The contralto often has beautiful music to sing, but her operatic impersonation is one that offends or antagonizes the public. A contralto may sing like an angel, but on the dramatic stage the greatest sympathy of the public usually goes to the soprano. The soprano is always the heroine and stands in the limelight of nobility. There is poor Aïda, so lovely and affectionate, while Amneris is her hateful contralto contrast. Look at Ortrud, what a thoroughly despicable character she is! The public adores Elsa, and hates Ortrud and even if you are singing Ortrud’s part yourself you feel a little the same way, and can understand why the audience feels so. And then—something which one may not think of—it is always more difficult to make the voice sound beautiful when the singer is expressing hateful emotions. This is an actual fact. In ‘Hamlet’ the Queen Mother, who is the contralto, goes about tearing her hair

all the time; and Massenet's *Hérodiade* is a most disagreeable stage character. In Lalo's '*Roi d'Ys*,' Margared, the contralto, is of course the wicked sister, who drowns out the town by opening the gate which lets in the sea, and the soprano sister is the good one. In Massenet's '*Cendrillon*,' a rôle I created at the Brussels Royal Opera House, '*La Monnaie*,' I was Madame de la Haltière—of course, being a contralto rôle, she was the wicked stepmother. And in '*Hänsel and Gretel*' the contralto naturally is the Witch. It is a jolly rôle musically, because the music expresses the eerie and sinister character so marvelously well. [But it is so difficult to sing!] The contralto, frankly speaking, is just an old Witch, and to make the part realistic she has to keep busy feeding up the children like the old cannibal she is, tear around the stage, ride a broomstick and jump about in the most breathless fashion. And it is hard to sing well while going through a strenuous course of physical exercise. In fact, the one great point in singing the rôle of the Witch in '*Hänsel and Gretel*' is not to get out of breath. When it comes to the

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Witch in 'Die Königskinder,' I know the whole audience is relieved to learn in Act Three, that she has been burned to death.

"But there are a few really lovely contralto rôles. Dalila in Saint-Saëns' opera is rather betwixt and between. Of course the real hero of the work is poor old Samson. Everybody loves Samson. Yet Dalila is not nearly as unsympathetic as Ortrud, let us say. Dalila is a one-hundred per cent Philistine, who is doing her very best for her country and her country's gods. She is a sincere, genuine patriot, and I think that is one reason why the public likes the part. Azucena, too, in 'Trovatore,' the poor, sorrowing mother who has been sacrificed, wins the sympathy of the public because her part and the music are so natural.

"There are three contralto rôles in particular whose musical vocal and dramatic beauty sets them apart. One is Orfeo, the contralto rôle in Gluck's opera of the same name. It is naturally vocal, easy to sing, and the characterization is so fine and Orfeo so sympathetic that the artist can hardly help singing the part well. It is so

beautifully written for the voice that it would be a shame to change a single measure, and is as perfect to-day as when it was first sung in the old Paris *Académie de Musique* for Marie Antoinette to applaud. For me it is associated with one of my greatest operatic triumphs, the Metropolitan revival of 1909-1910, when I sang the rôle, as I have many times during several seasons.

“Waltraute in Wagner’s ‘Götterdämmerung,’ perhaps, is another supremely lovely contralto rôle. It is a rôle of only one scene, but the music! . . . It is a classic, one of the gems of the contralto repertoire. It makes great demands on interpretation, and calls for a powerful voice of great richness and fullness of tone to do it justice. Then, while speaking of the sympathetic contralto rôles, I should not forget Fides, in Meyerbeer’s ‘Le Prophète.’ In the opera Fides, the mother of the Prophet, plays a part which appeals vividly to the listener’s sympathies, and Meyerbeer has given her some of his most melodious music. The great Fides aria, ‘O prêtres de Baal,’ an invocation, is the test aria for all contraltos in



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France. By it the contralto stands or falls when it comes to getting an engagement in Paris. It does require a great artist to sing it as it should be sung. The range of the aria is from low G to the high C in coloratura. When I was studying in Paris the time came when I decided to start singing in opera. 'Then you must study the Fides aria,' said my teacher. 'It is the first thing they will ask you to sing.' I had six weeks' time, but—my time was so taken up and filled in with lessons of various sorts; I was studying singing, the French language, diction and dramatics—I could not set aside more than ten minutes every day at the end of a lesson, no matter which, for 'O prêtres de Baal.' But I gave it the successive ten minute periods, learned it, and was ready to sing it when the time came.

### THE TIPTOP NOTE OF THE REGISTER

"I cannot say that I believe the high register tones 'wear out' unduly through use, that is right use, but striking the tiptop note of your range is like exerting your utmost muscular strength. Neither effort is one meant to be sustained for

long. It would be impossible to do so. Beyond your normally highest note there may be one or two higher ones you may be able to reach and strike, for a moment. But the sounding of these tiptop notes represents a *tour de force*. Say you can lift a hundred pounds of weight, ordinarily. You might, under stress of circumstance, be able to lift one hundred and fifty pounds; but it would be a momentary, heroic effort. I can sing the high C in the scales and in Fides as a passing note, but not attacked suddenly and sustained without preparation. In the aria it is properly written to be sung. It occurs in the middle of a coloratura passage based on an arpeggio, and the voice runs naturally up to it, touches it, and then at once descends again. I think these high tones which put the singer on her mettle are often a distinct advantage. She is forced to make a superb effort and often, to her surprise, will discover she possesses vocal powers and possibilities of which she was unaware. If left to herself in the matter of range, the singer is often inclined to follow the line of least resistance. There is where the composer can do great things

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for her. The vocal composers have really been the great trainers and educators of the singers. They have revealed their latent powers to them, and compelled them to do their best. Take Gluck, Handel, Mozart, with their coloraturas in the Italian style; Wagner, whose vocal lines compel resonance and volume of tone; and Bach, the educator of the future.

### COMPRESSING FIVE YEARS' STUDY INTO TWO

“I was Mr. Homer’s pupil when we married, and, carrying out our plans, we went direct to Paris, prepared to stay there two entire years. Student singers so often suffer from irregular eating; something which has more to do with making or marring careers than one might think. We had none of that. Living at home, we ate good home food at regular hours, and I dropped easily and naturally into an intensive routine of study. For it was Mr. Homer’s idea and my own that we put five years’ work into two. I have never had to regret it. I actually saved three years, and was able to start out in opera

that much earlier. With the exception of fifteen of twenty minutes daily of practice, the rest of my time was given to lessons, lessons, lessons! I practiced with my teachers, literally! And thus I avoided all the evils into which the student may fall when she practices too much alone. It was an expensive process, but it paid. So many young students injure their voices by unsupervised practice. During my second year I was taking three lessons in French, three in diction and three in acting every week in addition to my daily lessons in singing. Well, now for the result. I came to Paris in September of one year and the June following the January of the second year I was singing in opera at Vichy and Angers, all the big contralto rôles, Ortrud, Amneris, Favorita, Dalila, etc., in French.

### LEARNING ITALIAN AND GERMAN

“A year after my French *début*, I was asked to sing at Covent Garden, London, as the leading contralto. When I had sung some arias and had been engaged, the managers said: ‘Of course, Madame Homer, you know you will have to sing

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Ortrud and Fricka in German, and Amneris in Italian.' So I just smiled and nodded my head and said 'Oh, yes,' and let it go at that. The truth was that I did not know a word of either German or Italian. But I was not going to tell them that. I had just two weeks in which to prepare. I spent them in Paris. In the mornings an Italian lady came to me and I learned my Italian rôles word for word, like a parrot but, of course, learning the exact meaning of every word. In the afternoon a German coach went through the German rôles with me till I was letter-perfect. I never did have to sing Ortrud or Fricka that season in London, either! I did, however, for all the process was mechanical, learn a lot of German from those rôles I studied and I sang them in London the following year.

### SINGING IN OPERA AND IN CONCERT

"Both hark back to one thing—you have to know how to sing. If you can *really* sing you can sing anything—Wagner, Mozart, opera, oratorio, concert. [ Of course, every singer will sing best the music she likes best. I find that



## LOUISE HOMER

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both my recital work and my work in opera benefit by alternating the two, and not waiting for the end of the opera season to start on my concert tour. I learn to *sing*, detail singing, much better in concert; and go back refreshed to opera because there I will again gain breadth and the grand style. If the singer works too long in concert she runs the risk of becoming a little stilted and unemotional. She gets to be almost too finicky about little points of detail and finish. In opera she is forced to throw herself into her part. You have to have technic to sing opera, but you may also forget it. On the concert platform you have to be so particular in minute details that it is easy to grow too introspective. You *may* get through opera without finished technic, but in recital you have to have it.

“There is no acting or movement, no costume, there is no scenery on the recital stage; there are no companions to whom you can motion, and no orchestra to cover up your defects. At first it may seem hard to get used to the stillness and bareness of the concert stage, but you also can get to love that quietude, and the lack of scenic

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and other extraneous factors. If you can sing well your ability will show to a far greater extent in concert work.

### THE QUESTION OF PRACTICE

"I always practice one hour a day during the season; often from eleven to twelve in the morning, but more often from eleven to one, or from four to five in the afternoon. When I work two hours, I give one of them to straight technic: scales, sustained tones and arpeggios, singing *piano* and *forte*. Then I develop exercises on *solfège* or the *Ah* in all sorts of ways and in different keys; and I also use especially beautiful and difficult passages in opera arias and songs for exercise material. It is a simple and practical way of overcoming practical difficulties.

"Most of my life I have stopped singing altogether for three or four whole months every year. The old idea of doing exercises every livelong day of your existence is often questioned now. Dropping singing altogether for a while gives the singer's mind a rest. And one wants to have something of the summer fun and relaxation

after working hard all season. I have my husband and my children, and I want to spend a real vacation with them. But it is hard to practice even half an hour each day. One cannot practice right after meals or directly after sleeping, and I can't have vocal exercises break into swimming and tramping parties, and lots of other vacation joys. So I let them go altogether. The singer likes to feel that she is a free agent once in a while. It seems hard for a week or two when you start working again, but routine soon reasserts itself and in the meantime you have had the benefit of a rest, physically and mentally.

#### AUDIENCE AND PROGRAM ON THE CONCERT STAGE

"It seems to me that, as a general thing, the American audience likes best songs which tell a story, narrative songs, or songs which present some fine ideal in a dramatic way, like Mr. Homer's 'To Russia'—the Joaquin Miller poem. And then they like the great human emotions. My husband's setting of Hood's 'Song of the Shirt,' with its burden of human misery and op-

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pression, or an old Stephen Foster ballad are always appreciated. I usually sing 'Old Black Joe,' because the people just love it. And the average American audience is very responsive to a fine song of the religious type. A thing like Chadwick's 'Ballad of the Trees and the Master,' or 'Sheep and Lambs'—if you give an audience one or two of such songs on a program, it has something to take home and think about. And the audiences like the folk song or song in the folk style, whether sacred or secular.

### THE BALANCE OF THE PROGRAM

"I have worked out my own way of balancing my programs. I use the customary group system, but present four instead of more groups. First, I have a group of the older Italian songs and classical arias, and always include an oratorio aria by Bach, or Handel or Mendelssohn. My second group is one of modern French, German and Italian songs, and here I introduce my opera aria, if I use one at all.

"I am the first to admit that, speaking as a musical purist, the opera aria by rights has no

place on the recital program.] But—the people in the Middle West and South, in the towns and cities where they always hear *about* opera without ever *actually* hearing it, insist upon an opera aria. They feel cheated when the singer does not include one among her songs. In New York, Boston or Chicago I would not dream of placing an operatic coloratura air on a recital program, unless it were some old classic like ‘Che farò’ from ‘Orfeo,’ or, a song from one of the Mozart scores, or one like Saint-Saëns’ ‘Mon cœur s’ouvre,’ which is not intimately tied up with the action and plot of the opera from which it is taken, and can stand alone as a lyric song.

“My third group is always one made up of Mr. Homer’s songs—and not because he is my husband, but because the songs appeal. You see, no matter how much a singer thinks of her husband the songs she sings must please her audience. And Mr. Homer’s do. He has covered a wide range in composition, and I have beautiful lyric numbers, like ‘Sheep and Lambs’; as well as big dramatic ones, like ‘To Russia,’ from which to select. And in his songs the



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audiences like the words as well as the music. I have been very successful of late with a group of 'Mother Goose' melodies he has written, and use them in a sequence of effect, ending with 'The House that Jack Built,' that makes all the people who thought maybe they were being given something too childish and simple to which to listen, sit up and applaud.

"My last group is one of songs by modern English and American composers. And here, I will admit, I am very hard to please. I have sung John Alden Carpenter's songs for the past ten years. Why? Because the people like them and I love them myself. I sing Frank Bridges, Parker, Chadwick and others, and lately have been singing two charming songs by Carl Deis, his 'Come Down to Kew,' and 'The Flight of the Moon.' In this last group the songs must be very varied in color and mood. And I believe in ending with something brilliant and cheerful—to let the people go out in a happy mood. In fact, balance in the program must be considered throughout, and especially in a concluding group. Something high and something low, something

quick and something slow (to put it in rhyme), something tender and soft, or loud and dramatic, for the program wants all the contrast the singer's art can lend it.

### THE LITERARY FACTOR IN THE CONCERT SONG

"I think it important for every concert singer to cultivate a sense for the literary quality in the song text. Successful concert singing is based on the development of the imaginative side of song. In a few, brief moments the singer must create an atmosphere and make an effect. And the appeal to the imagination, to the latent poetry of the audience lies in the text.

"It is the text which often makes it hard for me to find songs for my repertoire. Often I find a song whose music suits me, but whose text holds no appeal whatsoever, or is a direct detriment to the music. It is the songs with the best poems, the best text ideas underlying the music, with which the singer can win the greatest success" . . . and then the maid came with the coffee, and as the coffee was a prelude to the arrival of

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Madame Homer's car, the interview was at an end. And this was a pity, for there were other questions which might have been asked; Madame Homer could have answered them, and to the point.





MARIA IVOGUN

AS NORINA IN "DON PASQUALE"



## MARIE IVOGÜN

MARIE IVOGÜN, the distinguished Munich *diva*, who has created some of the most notable coloratura rôles in modern German opera, and who is one of the century's most famous Mozart interpreters, had consented to see the writer and give him the benefit of some of her impressions and convictions anent the coloratura soprano and her rôles, as well as some advice drawn from her own experience which might benefit the young American student aspiring to the honors of the operatic stage. Comfortably established in the pleasant morning room of her hotel—it looked out, on the occasion in question, on one of our dreariest and rainiest New York mornings—where some of the songs she was singing on her recital tour lay open on the piano, she spoke first of all of her own early years of study.

“Perhaps some of the things which I will tell you, American girls already are learning at first hand in Vienna, at the *Akademie für Musik*,

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where quite a few of them study. No, I did not make up my mind when a child to become a *prima donna*; nothing of the sort. My mother, who was an artist, never insisted I *must* become a great singer; there was no attempt on her part to fill my childish head with lofty operatic ambitions. At fifteen, seeing that I had an attractive little voice, she decided that it was worth having cultivated on general principles, but without any definite plan for the future. Yet I took to singing, enjoyed it very much, and grew more and more interested in it. And it seems to me that an ambition to become an operatic artist ought to develop out of the student's own musical interest, her enjoyment of the music and her love for it; and that this is a surer and more natural beginning toward realizing it, than to make up one's mind long before understanding the work and sacrifice demanded, to be a *stella prima donna*.

### THE OPERA CLASSES AT THE VIENNA AKADEMIE

"When, somewhat later, however, I decided to devote myself seriously to a professional

## MARIE IVOGÜN

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career, I went to Vienna, where I studied with Madame Schlemmer-Ambros, the daughter of Ambros, the great musical historian and an admirable teacher. She gave me private lessons at first, and I continued with her when I entered the *Akademie*. It took a long, long time before I was allowed to sing an opera aria, or, for that matter, any song at all. Over and over, week in, week out, I practiced tone technic, scales and intervals, what we call *Freiübungen* in German, and together with these the Mathilde Marchesi, the Bordogni, the Garcia and other *vocalises*. And, after a time, I was given a little song work, though the songs were prepared only from a standpoint of tonal technic and voice production, for technical formulas occur in most songs, again and again. While it is easy to sympathize with the impatience of many young artists who grow weary of a routine grind of this kind, its value, I think, can hardly be questioned; and it gives an absolute sureness and vocal reliance which nothing else supplies.

“The course at the *Akademie* is really a six-year course, but my voice was already well placed

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when I entered, and having passed various preparatory examinations, I was able to enter the opera classes at once, thus reducing my course to three years, three years of the hardest kind of work. To give you an idea of how thorough the preparatory studies were for the dramatic stage, I might mention that during the first year we prepared small operatic rôles, but only to *speak*, never to *sing* them! We studied books containing scenes especially written to cover every variety of dramatic situation; a young girl pleading with tears in her eyes; denouncing a villain; greeting a returned lover, or a long-lost parent; finding a letter and reading it with proper 'business'; portraying different emotions, but always *parlando*. During the second year we began to sing actual scenes from the operas and there were regular 'Performance Evenings,' at which as many as fifteen scenes would be presented by the students of the opera classes. Of course there were other studies, piano, musical history, costume, theory, instrumentation, Italian and French, acting and even fencing—this last not

for actual stage use, but only to promote flexibility, give the singer a graceful stage presence and teach her how to move lightly and easily across the boards. During the third and finishing year of our studies we were supposed to perfect ourselves in the operatic repertory proper to our individual voices—I studied all the standard coloratura rôles that year—and to acquire all those details which are so important in making the portrayal of a rôle convincing from the stage point of view as well as the purely musical one.

“One of the most valuable features of the work at the *Akademie* was the opportunity given, three times a week, for the students to watch each other sing and play their parts on a small stage in the institution. To my mind there is nothing more valuable for the student of opera singing than the opportunity of comparing her work with the work of the others. One profits equally by their mistakes or by the superior excellence of their work, and I have gleaned many a valuable hint with regard to the singing and interpretation of a rôle by watching my fellow students.



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## PREPARING A COLORATURA RÔLE

“The coloratura soprano must really be born with the peculiar gift which gives her her name, I think. Of course, coloratura, like anything else, can be cultivated; but I do not think that that is enough. First of all the student must have a natural aptitude, a natural preference for it. When it comes to preparing a new coloratura rôle I never approach it directly; first I must read and study the libretto of the opera; I must know the whole plot, the story of which my rôle is only a portion. And, when possible, I go directly to the source of the libretto itself. For instance, in preparing ‘The Marriage of Figaro,’ first of all I read Beaumarchais’ play. Then I must have a general idea—which one can always obtain by going over the vocal score at the piano—of the music as a whole. This gives me a clear conception of the relative place of my own rôle with regard to the entire opera, for I must know the whole opera, musically as well as textually, in order to properly balance my own part. And now I am ready to run over my rôle in a pre-

liminary way, get a good general idea of it, and then begin to pick out for more intensive study certain passages and difficulties which in every operatic rôle written have to be placed vocally and 'sung into the voice.' This, of course, precedes the fascinating artistic study developed in rehearsal, where after having fitted my coloratura rôle into my own voice, I take up the delicate and interesting work of fitting it into the musical *ensemble* in conjunction with my colleagues. Together with this last perfecting of the new rôle, there goes, of course, the study of the period and costume for dresses and accessories in order that every detail of personal appearance will aid the musical effect of the presentation of the part. This last occupation, though not strictly a musical one, needless to say, is an especially fascinating and important one from a woman's point of view for"—and the *diva* smiled amiably—"a singer naturally wants to look well and sing well, and I am sure if I were in the audience the loveliest coloratura passages would lose in effect for me if they were sung by a singer who looked like a fright.

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## COLORATURA IN THE MOZART OPERAS

“Mozart was one of the greatest masters of coloratura writing, and all the coloratura rôles in his operas are grateful for the singer. Take the wonderful arias of the Queen of the Night in his ‘Magic Flute’! They are difficult, quite as difficult as they look on the printed page, but they were evidently written with the most thorough understanding of what the soprano voice can actually do. The student who aspires to operatic honors will find no more valuable study material for coloratura work than these arias in the Mozart scores, provided, of course, that she is properly equipped to study them, vocally and intellectually. Any one who can sing Mozart has stood the acid test and can sing the French and Italian coloratura rôles and all those which the coloratura soprano shares with the lyric soprano; but I question whether there are any arias more beautiful than those in the Mozart rôles. There is the rôle of Susanna, for instance, in ‘The Marriage of Figaro,’ which aside from its musical attractiveness is a sympathetic part to play because of the

success with which the librettist has presented an intensely human and lovable womanly character. And there is Zerlina in Mozart's 'Don Giovanni.' Here, aside from being able to sing her florid passages convincingly, the singer must succeed in producing the impression of being a genuine rustic coquette, and when representing such a character the singer's *bravura* passages must be absolutely clear, absolutely convincing, or else the music, instead of lending a graceful final touch to a delicate comedy of interpretation, may suggest parody instead. Every coloratura passage must have a meaning just as if it were sung to actual words. Coloratura must *express* something if it is to be musically interesting. And all vocal filigree *must* be clear and pure; there can be no swindling. It should never become mere ornamental vocalization.

"I am especially fond of the part of Constanze in 'The Abduction from the Seraglio.' The music given Constanze seems to me to be one of Mozart's happiest operatic characterizations. She is a real human figure, and in her music, as in that of Mozart's other coloratura rôles—it is only

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apparently a contradiction to say so—the lovely lyric element, the purely melodic, is never forgotten. The great Constanze aria actually seems written for an instrument, treated instrumentally. It might almost have been written for the violin. Of Constanze's three arias the second is seldom sung (though it is, perhaps, musically the finest). And in Constanze's exquisite duet with Belmont the singer has a chance to put her whole heart into one of the loveliest of Mozart's soul pictures. And what a master Mozart is when it comes to creating an orchestral background which sets off the singer's voice! And the wonderful recitatives! I do not think that the Mozart scores are anywhere given more beautifully or more in keeping with the spirit of his magic and his time than in the *Residenz Theater* in Munich. The small stage is ideally suited for these works and the wealth of rococo ornamentation in its architecture supplies absolutely the right atmosphere for their performances. And when Bruno Walter conducts it is no longer merely opera—it is music in the purest and highest sense. Then, too, Anton von Fuchs,



the stage director, and the other artists responsible, have devised wonderfully appropriate stage settings, especially in connection with the 1921 Festival performances.

### THE HALF-AND-HALF COLORATURA RÔLES

“There are certain operatic rôles which are lyric or coloratura, according to the artist who sings them and the manner in which they are sung, and there are rôles which might be called quasi-coloratura, like that of *Traviata* in the opera of the same name, and the attractive rôle of *Mimi*, in Puccini’s ‘*La Bohème*.’ This last rôle I am very fond of—it gives every singer who can act as well as sing admirable opportunities. There are a number of these rôles, and the coloratura soprano should add them to her repertoire in order to give greater warmth and expression to the voice. In general the singer should not try to specialize too much. The study of all branches will increase her knowledge of the special one she cultivates. The study of musically valuable songs, not necessarily operatic ones, also makes

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for greater depth and a more thorough understanding of one's art.]

### COLORATURA RÔLES IN MODERN OPERA

“For a time it seemed as though modern composers did not intend to do much for the coloratura soprano; but some of them changed their minds and as a result there are some very grateful rôles of this kind to be found in the operas of the present day. Richard Strauss has done well by the coloratura guild in ‘Ariadne auf Naxos,’ and the coloratura rôle of Zerbinetta is a very grateful one. In Mozart’s orchestra the instrumentation always makes a frame, a tonal halo, for the voice, and Strauss has done the same for the part of Zerbinetta in ‘Ariadne,’ though usually, in modern orchestration the voice is regarded, more or less, as one of the orchestral instruments. In the new version of the opera, a serious opera, ‘Ariadne auf Naxos’ and a comic masque are simultaneously presented as the extravagant caprice of a wealthy man. Zerbinetta is a flirt and a coquette, and amuses herself when the opportunity offers, by trying to cheer up the

despairing Grecian maiden Ariadne. Zerbinetta's monster coloratura aria is one of the most brilliant, effective and difficult coloratura numbers to be found in a modern score and—unlike so many modern vocal movements—is sufficiently well defined and musically interesting to be sung on the recital stage. I have used it in concert here with much success. The whole scene in the opera in which Zerbinetta plays the leading part is conceived in the classic style, and in her rondo air the theme is literally hidden beneath a wealth of embellishments, passages and cadenzas. I rehearsed this rôle, which I have so often sung under Strauss in Vienna, Berlin and Munich, at my home in Munich with Strauss himself at the piano, and he told me that it was so difficult that until I had sung it for him he had his doubts as to whether he would be able to find an adequate interpreter for it. Since Strauss wrote his 'Ariadne,' another German composer has written a real coloratura rôle. This, one of the most attractive of all modern German coloratura parts, is that of the Nightingale in Walter Braunfels' 'The Birds,' which I created at the first perform-

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ance in the Munich National Theater. I consider it a very lovely vocal development of a programmatic idea. In the opera the songs of the Nightingale are identified with all that is good and beautiful in life, and the composer has written much music which does credit to this idea. The rôle presents one fine melody after another, and there are beautiful sections in the duet in the second act, a real gem of melancholy yearning, beginning with trills which captivate every musical ear. It is distinctly a warm coloratura rôle, for a Nightingale must be a passionate singer, and as there is little opportunity for bodily movement, and the costume is a quiet one, the singer must conquer her listeners with her music alone. The rôle really lies admirably for the voice. In general, the voice is used by the modern composer purely as an instrument; nor are the song passages in modern opera set arias; there is so much *parlando* singing, so much music-drama that it is hard, at times, to secure the proper effect.

“A composer who has written some fine operas of a very distinct type is Hans Pfitzner. I

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created the purely lyric rôle of the boy Ighino, Palestrina's son, in Pfitzner's 'Palestrina.' It is full of melodic monologues, very interesting and musically difficult. Pfitzner's music is very clear and chaste, and he always finds story motives which suit the peculiarly mystic, often harsh music which he writes. I studied the rôle with Pfitzner himself, and it is always a valuable experience for the singer to be able to go over her rôle with the composer who has written it. One gets his ideas and *aperçus* and his own conception of how he thinks his music should be sung. And the greater composers are not at all dictatorial; they do not pretend to tell the experienced singer her business, but treat her with the respect and consideration one colleague shows another. Erich Korngold is another modern composer who wrote an attractive rôle for me. It is the part of Laura in his 'Ring des Polykrates,' a naïve little lyric rôle which I created in Munich in 1916. The work is a short one, for a small stage, but very melodious.

"But the fact that there are interesting modern rôles should never blind the singer to the beauties



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of the older ones. I like to sing the French and Italian rôles, the beautiful coloratura parts that Gounod and Delibes, Rossini and Verdi and so many others have written. I am especially fond of the rôle of Norina in Donizetti's 'Don Pasquale' and of Gilda in 'Rigoletto,' to mention only two among a number. The characters in modern opera, too, are often more complex and their music is more subtly expressive of their nature than in the older opera, and one must always take this into consideration when studying modern rôles.

### WHAT THE STUDENT OF OPERA SHOULD REMEMBER

"The student of opera should remember—especially in coloratura rôles—that the purely vocal and technical *must* always come before any interpretation. In order to do justice to her art she must make up her mind not to take things easy; to concentrate, to work hard. While I was studying at the *Akademie* I never could nor would find time for balls and social festivities, excursions and parties. My only recreations

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were attending concerts and going to the theater, and even this I did in order to help me in my work, both musically and from the standpoint of acting. Opera is an exacting profession if the singer wishes to rise high in it; singing alone is not enough. Natural endowment, a gift of expression, a fine voice, a good stage presence, ability to act, are not sufficient in themselves; it takes application to develop, unify and perfect them, and personally, I know of nothing that will take the place of this one factor. To what do I ascribe my own success? To a good natural gift, good teachers and diligent study. Every aspirant to operatic honors should realize that there can be no great art without sacrifice of some kind or another, or without observing the golden rule of reverence for the art to which one dedicates one's self. And first of all the singer must love her art!"







MARIA JERITZA

AS SIEGLINDA IN "DIE WALKÜRE"



## MARIA JERITZA

MARIA JERITZA, the golden *stella prima donna*, of the New York Metropolitan and the Vienna *Hofoper*, talked of her art for the benefit of the American song student with unaffected kindness and amiability when the writer interviewed her in her New York home at the St. Regis Hotel. She was looking forward, in the course of the next few days, in fact, to hearing candidates sing for the free scholarship she had just founded in Paris. It is now affording a talented young American girl, whose voice justifies cultivation, the privilege of studying with Mme. Blanche Marchesi.

“When did I begin to sing? Well,” said Mme. Jeritza, with that golden smile which matches her voice, “I have always sung. I began when I was a little girl of ten, and at twelve I was attending the *Musikschule* in Brünn. There, aside from regular class instruction, Professor

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Krejci gave me private lessons twice a week. I think myself that I had a good, clear voice when a child, but Krejci was even then convinced that I had a future, and taught me with the greatest care. He taught me one very important thing right at the start, something which every student should realize—*not* to scream, and *not* to force my voice. It is a lesson every vocal student should take to heart, for the habit of screaming and forcing the tone, if developed when the voice is forming, and persisted in, has ruinous consequences. Professor Krejci made me do a good deal of scale work. He would never let me experiment singing songs of all descriptions indiscriminately, a singing evil some teachers encourage.

“Yes, I sang as a girl in the convent, too, but only church music, in Latin. How well I remember the winter mornings when the novices were routed out of bed at six in the morning—oh, so sleepy!—to sing in the chapel. And the chapel in winter was so cold we nearly froze to death. Yes, I know that Latin is a good singing language, full of broad, vowel sounds; but even if

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I had thought of that then it would not have made me feel any warmer.

### THINGS THE OPERA STUDENT SHOULD KNOW

“Of course, I can only advise the girl who is studying opera out of my own experience. Yet much that applies to the artist, the singer who is already active on the opera stage, applies as well to the student who hopes to appear on it. For instance, there is the matter of the speaking voice. So many girls do not seem to realize that the speaking voice is actually the enemy of the singing voice. If you use the speaking voice too much; if you indulge in loud laughter, loud conversation, you are bound to hurt your singing voice. The student may never give the matter a thought, yet it is the easiest thing in the world to overdo conversation, if you are a singer. And the strain reacts on the vocal cords.

“Another thing is to cultivate repose and get enough sleep. This is as important for the student who works hard as for the *prima donna*. I find that during the season, in order to do

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justice to my rôles, I need a good deal of quiet and much sleep. I cannot go out much in society, attend affairs where late hours will be kept, where there will be much animated conversation, laughter, smoking. Do not misunderstand me," added Mme. Jeritza, "it is not that I am what you call a 'gloom' in English. I like to laugh," and the great singer uttered a low, happy laugh which approached as closely to music as laughter may, more closely than many "laughing songs" we have heard; it was not the loud laughter calculated to strain the vocal cords. Then she once more became serious. "No, loud laughter, loud talk are poison for the singing voice. I never go out on the days when I have a big rôle to sing. No afternoon teas, no visits to the dressmaker, no excursions or parties. I just rest and actually spend much of my time in bed, so that I will be quite fresh, able to concentrate and give the public my very best in the evening performance.

"In the forenoon or afternoon I run over my part again, perhaps picking out a passage here or there, remodeling a phrase. Otherwise, however, rest is my motto. Aside from my actual

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repertoire work the only music singing I do is that of exercises for vocal flexibility.

### A PERSONAL RECEIPT FOR SUCCESS IN SINGING

“Well, as regards *what* to practice in the way of exercises I can only give you a kind of personal receipt. In the first place, it means the world and all for the student of singing to be in good hands from the very start. I realize it keenly, for I was fortunate in this respect; first with Professor Krejci, then with Professor Auspitzer, of Brünn. There are fundamentals the student can obtain only from a good teacher. Teaching, good or bad, influences one’s whole career, so see that your teachers are the best. But, aside from the more musical, the technical, I believe I have largely educated myself as a singer. The singer, if she will only use her brains, can learn so much from observation. She can do so much for herself by self-analysis, by studying her own voice, and the manner in which she sings. Of course, later, when I studied the important rôles I have created, I have had the



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advantage of coaches such as Richard Strauss, Schalk and such inspired tutors as the great Max Reinhardt, the famous stage manager Gregor and Professor Wilhelm von Wymetal, who was knighted by the late Franz Josef, an honor which never in the world befell a stage manager before. I can truthfully say, however, that even before meeting these distinguished teachers, I had learned much myself, and through my own efforts.

“How do I practice every day? In the summer, when I am preparing new rôles, perhaps two hours a day in all; but I divide my time. I may sing for fifteen or twenty minutes, and then not sing again for an hour or so. I do my daily flexibility exercises every day, the scales at different speeds, beginning them *mezza voce* and working up to the full sustained tone. I also sing Marchesi *vocalises* and *solfeggios*, which include all sorts of coloratura passages and ornaments. During the season, when I am singing on the stage, I never practice, aside from rehearsals, more than an hour a day. The purely technical exercises do not really represent a

strain. I always look on them *as* purely technical, a mechanical means of oiling the voice, making it light, easily responsive; just as the simple gymnastic exercises I use make the body flexible and supple.

### THE ROUTINE OF ACQUIRING A NEW RÔLE

"I have a regular routine when studying a new part. First comes the reading of the libretto. Then, so that I will feel entirely at home in the work, especially if it is a period opera, I read all sorts of books which will give me the atmosphere of the epoch in question. If I am to represent a character of a certain time and day, I must have a knowledge of that character's point of view and surroundings, mental and material, for a basis. Getting this basis—and I consider it very important—may cost me eight or ten days. Then comes the music. I first go over it in a purely technical way; I make note of the mechanical difficulties; the arrangement of the vocal line, breath and phrasing. I can get up the most difficult operatic rôle by heart in four or five days and sing its music in the rough. And then

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comes the most difficult part of all—the filing down, the polishing, the working out of every least little detail. An intricate piece of goldsmith work offers the nearest comparison, perhaps, to this part of opera study. The goldsmith has his design outlined; but he must lend the utmost clarity and beauty to every line and every curve. And so, too, every line and curve of the melody, every rise and fall of the accent, every dramatic and lyric inflection in the general design of an operatic rôle must be brought out, and brought into relationship with the rest of the work. This is no eight-day process, but takes me from four to five weeks. I take this work very seriously; for I know of no other way of giving vitality, real human quality to a rôle. And no singer, be she ever so popular, has a right to rely on her popularity to excuse poor preparation. Even quite small rôles can be beautifully done. I noticed a case recently, at a Metropolitan rehearsal. It was a pleasure to watch the work of the two artists concerned, who carried out the small, relatively unimportant parts intrusted to them with an exquisite finish

and perfection. The young operatic aspirant who has been given a small part to sing in opera should never feel herself above it on that account. She should prepare it just as carefully and as conscientiously as though she were singing the title rôle.

### THE LEADING RÔLES IN MODERN OPERA

"I cannot understand why the modern composer so often insists on writing for the human voice as though it were an orchestral instrument of wood or brass. There is the part of the Princess, in Fritz Schrecker's opera 'Das Spielwerk der Prinzessin,' which I have sung. Vocally it is one of the most terrible things ever written, I think. The soprano is compelled to roar, roar, roar from beginning to end, in order to make a vain attempt to hold her own against a forest of orchestral instruments so thick that one cannot even see the individual trees. Aside from these perverse and repulsive modern operatic heroines, whose peculiar psychology it is so hard to realize and to present with conviction, the singer is confronted with vocal tasks the voice is not

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meant to fulfill. A part like that of the Princess. . . . Well, think of a strong rubber band being stretched out full length, again and again and again, for hours at a time! How long would it stand the strain? And the vocal cords are really delicate, like threads. Really, after such roaring and screaming, to sing a genuine Italian or Mozart opera aria seems like a balsam to the voice. No, there seem to be no real vocal 'lines' in many modern scores. All one can do is to scream and shout.

### CONDUCTORS AND COACHES

"I work in the Metropolitan Opera House under the happiest conditions. Mr. Gatti-Casazza is a father to his operatic flock, my colleagues are kind, and every one unites in trying to reach a high standard of attainment in every opera studied. Mr. Bodansky controls the fine orchestra in so magnetic a way that I think he could make a dead man sing for him at rehearsal. Both here and in Austria I have been fortunate in my conductors.

"At the Vienna *Hofoper* Richard Strauss,



## MARIA JERITZA

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Ferdinand Schalk, who has been a fatherly friend to me, and Volere Freund, are masters. To study a new part with Richard Strauss is a real experience. He and Schalk often came to my home in Vienna and would run over my rôles at the piano with me. Strauss is clearness itself when he explains, and he knows exactly which effects he wants to produce. He insists on a beautiful melody line. And he is always willing to help the singer; change a difficult interval in a vocal phrase or make any reasonable modification.

“There is a reason why Strauss and Schalk came to my house to coach me in Vienna. When studying a new rôle I have one fixed rule, a principle, and I have always lived up to it; when I have no real, definite reason for being in an opera house, when I am not rehearsing or singing a performance there—I stay away! In the first place I have no business there and, secondly, it keeps me aloof from any operatic gossip or discussion, any ‘shop talk,’ which I detest.

“Erich Korngold wrote his one-act dramatic opera ‘Violanta,’ staged in Renaissance Venice,

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and 'The Dead City' for me. Korngold is a modern composer who tries to keep away from the ultramodern. I hope that he will follow the Italian line of beautiful melody. There are some fine lyric moments in 'The Dead City' but I think Korngold is sometimes tempted to write music which does not lie well for the voice.

### STRAUSS AND PUCCINI HEROINES

"Strauss has written a part for me, and both he and Puccini have given me rôles which it has been fascinating to create. I am fond of Puccini's heroines because they are so human, because they are flesh-and-blood women whom the public loves. And, as I have already hinted, I am human enough myself to try and make cruel characters a little less cruel, to soften down some of their vicious angles. . . . On the other hand, the more complex and subtle types of heroines are in their way a natural development of modern artistic and emotional trends and currents, and it is impossible for the artist to ignore their significance. The study of these rôles is very interesting, as I have said, but for the singer, who

must absolutely become the character she is impersonating, if she is to sing her part convincingly, the transition from a Schrecker Carlotta to a Wagner Elizabeth, say, on short notice, is not at all easy.

### A MODERN STRAUSS RÔLE

“And just as I have studied ‘The Girl of the Golden West,’ ‘Tosca’ and ‘Il Tabarro’ with Puccini, so I have studied ‘Ariadne’ and ‘Rosenkavalier,’ as well as ‘Die Frau ohne Schatten’ with Strauss. I really could have had two rôles in that score, if it had been possible to sing them at once. Strauss had originally written the part of The Dyer’s Wife for me and then—he found he had no singer for the part of The Empress! I had already studied the other rôle, but Strauss fairly insisted on my singing this one. ‘You *must* sing The Empress,’ he said. ‘Please do it for me!’ So of course I did. I wish you might have seen and heard that *première* at the *Hofoper*. The costumes were wonderful as well as the music. You know the story is an oriental, or rather orientalized one, and as The Empress I wore a beau-

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tiful gold-studded Persian robe, with my hair trailing down to the ground. There are a good many changes of costumes, incidentally. It is musically a very inspiring score and orchestrally, too, one of the finest things Strauss has written, I think. In the first act I had a good deal of coloratura singing in the higher register to do, but my first actual song is a really entrancing bit of melody, tender and mystically beautiful; and it would be hard to find nobler, loftier music than that which Strauss has written for the scene in which The Empress is delivered from her enchantment, in the tremendously dramatic third act. In one tableau The Empress has not a single note to sing, as she is supposed to be a spirit.

### A "ROSENKAVALIER" DIFFICULTY

"Sometimes, the opera singer finds she has an unexpected difficulty with which to contend. In the *Rosenkavalier*, for instance, when I prepared the rôle of Octavian, a man's part, it was very hard for me to get into the spirit of the character. I am too much of a woman to be able to impersonate a man easily. You know women are

weaker-kneed than men—no, I do not mean this for a joke—they really are! Women carry themselves more negligently. They sit and stand and walk differently from men. [Yet where there is a will there is a way.] I worked and worked and worked, until my muscles were so trained, and I had so exactly acquired the little mannerisms a man comes by naturally, that I can now say I actually have muscles like a man. Some might call it stressing a detail to pay so much attention to having this point of an interpretation exact. But if I am to play a man's part, then, if I am a real artist, I must make it convincing, and it is worth any amount of trouble to get it right. [Any girl who wishes to succeed on the opera stage will find that taking infinite trouble in perfection of detail counts.] Whether it be a detail of singing, of stage business, of costume, of glance or gesture—opera is a complete form—no detail is too small to be overlooked!

### THE AMERICAN VOCAL STUDENT

“I have had many young American girls sing for me. I feel that the artist, whenever possible,



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should encourage those whose natural talents justify their making art their life work. That is why I thought I would like to found that Paris scholarship, with Mrs. Blanche Marchesi, for some talented young American girl. You have wonderful vocal material in this country; there is much natural talent. But sometimes I think there are too many vocal teachers in New York. If you only had a great national or state conservatory here, as we had in Vienna. There a young girl with a beautiful voice could be trained and educated by the best, the greatest teachers in the land, and the fact that she could not afford to pay for her tuition did not in the least interfere. Imagine, for instance, if an artist like Marcella Sembrich—I have never heard a pupil of hers who did not sing wonderfully well—were to be made head of the vocal department of a national conservatory, how much it would mean for the budding talent of the country!"





To  
Mr. Frederick H. Martens  
with best wishes

Tamaki Miura

1922

Tokio

TAMAKI MIURA

AS BUTTERFLY IN "MADAME BUTTERFLY"

## TAMAKI MIURA

MADAME TAMAKI MIURA, the only Madame Butterfly whom one might call "to the manner born" in a racial sense, since the charming little *prima donna* is a Japanese artist, gave the writer many study and interpretation hints by which the student might profit, when he visited her at her apartments in the Hotel Ansonia in New York. First of all she made clear that there is a vast difference between native Japanese singing and the occidental art song as it is cultivated by a Japanese artist singer.

### REAL JAPANESE SONG

"Real Japanese song is beautiful—if you have a Japanese soul with which to understand it. But I am afraid that if you have not, then it is apt to mean nothing at all to you. There is a great difference between the art songs of the native Japanese professional singers and the simple little

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folk songs which Japanese girls sing to their *samisens* or guitars. The professional singing is all very artificial, and when a professional street singer or a singer on the Japanese stage in Tokio, is singing an air she will roll her eyes and twist her neck, and use the Japanese grand theatrical manner to drag up notes from her body, such as an old bullfrog might sing, in a hoarse and hollow voice. This shows she is a real virtuoso. But there is nothing theatrical in the little folk songs, and even if you are not Japanese you can enjoy them, for the melodies are always plaintive and appealing, and the girls' voices, though they are always pitched in a high register, are usually very sweet and delicate. Of course, the Imperial Academy of Music in Tokio, where I studied, had excellent teachers, who developed the voice along the best European traditional lines.]

“At the Imperial Academy I studied, with Professor Junker, foundation exercises, Concone, German and Italian songs; and coloratura and French songs with Madame Petzold, a Norwegian. Signor Salcoli, an Italian operatic tenor, was the first to coach me in ‘Cavalleria



Rusticana.' Then, too, while I was in Tokio, Madame Loudon, the wife of the Dutch ambassador, a very fine singer and artist, coached me in the part of Euridyce in Gluck's 'Orfeo'—a rôle I have always been fond of, because I made my operatic *début* with it in Tokio.

"Later I studied with Sir Henry Wood in London, and I still like to remember that I made my London *début* in Albert Hall singing 'Caro nome' from 'Rigoletto,' at the same concert in which Adelina Patti made her last public appearance, before the King and Queen of England. Patti was charming to me, and she took the pains to give me a special lesson in singing 'Home, Sweet Home,' which I still sing as she taught me. I then spent some time with Madame Albani, in London—a wonderful teacher—studying opera rôles and Irish and Scotch songs with her. It was she who coached me in the first Madame Butterfly which I sang in London. I have also studied with Moranzoni, Jachiya, Madame Viafora—a very fine teacher—and Strani, here in the United States; and at present am taking lessons from Aldo Franchetti, who has done a great

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deal for my voice. No, I do not think I have suffered from having a number of teachers; each one of them has taught me things worth knowing.

### THE MATTER OF DAILY PRACTICE

“Formerly, the day before I had to sing *Madame Butterfly* in opera, I used to practice a whole hour; but now I do not practice when I am to sing *Madame Butterfly* the next day. You see, it is a great strain to sing continuously for three hours on the stage, and I cannot help putting so much feeling, so much emotion into that rôle—it is a rôle that is all sentiment—that I find I do best with a whole day of rest before the performance.

“Otherwise I have a regular routine for the days when I am to sing in the evening. I get up at ten o’clock, sing my exercises—scales and difficult vocal phrases—in the bathroom and music room. Then at eleven, I have coffee, eggs and a roll, and take a walk. At four in the afternoon I eat a real meal; good spaghetti, lamb chops, spinach, with a cup of tea; and at six I have a cup of coffee and some chicken sandwiches.

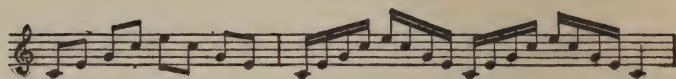
Then at eight o'clock I sing on the stage, taking a couple of eggs again in the theater, for they are very strengthening.

### ADVICE TO THE OPERA STUDENT

"First should come breathing exercises, which are absolutely necessary for the diaphragm, and while doing them attention should be paid to the position of throat and body. One should be sure it is natural and unconstrained. Then vowel practice: sustained notes from the lower register to your highest tone on the *a* and sustained tones on *a, e, i, o, u*. Next scales and *arpeggios*, with *crescendos* and *decrescendos*, marking the *pianos* and *fortes*. For flexibility and finish, quick scales, *staccato* and trills, and Concone or Marchesi are best, I think. I always practice before a mirror, because it is very easy unconsciously to get in the habit of making faces or grimacing, while if you can see your face you will not do so, or run the risk of contorting it on the stage in some big aria. I always use the following mechanical exercises in sustained notes and also difficult phrases from my operatic rôles:

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“Daily exercises are absolutely necessary to keep the voice fit, but the student should be careful not to overexercise. When the singer is tired—whether she be singing in opera or concert, or merely tired from practice—she had best give the voice a complete rest for the time being. Twenty minutes’ hard work in the morning, when I am fresh and interested, I find better than a couple of hours later in the day.

### THE FIRST JAPANESE OPERATIC SINGER

“It is natural, of course, that *Madame Butterfly* should be my favorite opera rôle. She is a Japanese heroine and I am a Japanese artist and have the figure and also an understanding of the

part from the racial angle which, perhaps, no other opera singer can claim to have. I do not have to imagine how poor *Butterfly* feels, I really *know*. Her soul and mind are Japanese, as are my own. There was no Japanese operatic singer when I began to study singing in Tokio, and it is one of my greatest joys to think that—aside from other rôles—I have been able to identify myself with one so ideally suited to my racial, human and artistic personality as that of Puccini's *Butterfly*. I have one difficulty as a Japanese artist with which most other opera singers do not have to contend. There are many rôles I could sing and would like to sing, but I cannot, of course, undertake rôles for which my figure is not adapted.

### DO NOT PLAN A CAREER IN ADVANCE

“Why should the vocal student try to plan her career in advance? The first thing is to be able to sing. The vocal student who is beginning can decide when she has reached the end of her study period whether her gifts are best adapted to the operatic or the concert stage. While studying



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she should concentrate on developing a beautiful tone. Of course, once she is clear in her mind as to her final goal—opera or concert—then she must bring all her strength, love and enthusiasm to bear on reaching it. There is no absolute specialization, in a way, which the real dramatic soprano need strive to attain until she is well advanced in her studies. If she has the gift, she can become a great artist in various types of rôles, dramatic, lyric or coloratura.

### PREPARING AN OPERA RÔLE

“Whether the music I am preparing is operatic or meant for the recital stage, the first thing to do is to get right at its meaning. When I have a new opera rôle to prepare, I read the story of the work, and then read the music. After that, day by day, I memorize a few pages and as I do so, study the dramatic action with my teacher and correlate it with the musical moods and their expression. All these details, and there are many of them, I rehearse each day before my mirror, so that my stage action and every movement of my arms, head and body will be natural and ef-

fective. Yet that is by no means the end of studying the rôle. I always find, after I have sung it on the stage, that all sorts of new possibilities in the way of singing beauty, movement and action develop. There are new points of view, new angles of approach to the interpretation of an operatic rôle which only actual performance on the stage brings to the notice of the artist. She can never discover them by herself in her music room while practicing.

### RECITAL HINTS

“The greatest thing in recital work is self-control, poise and self-confidence. And the singer must be in good spirits when she steps out on the platform. There should not be a single thing on her mind but the spirit and meaning of her songs. Yes, every audience I have sung for has shown that it likes to have operatic arias included in the recital program. So I usually begin my recital with an opera aria. Then comes a group of French songs, and another of old classic Italian *bel canto* arias and German *Lieder*. After that, and ending the first section of my program, I

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have a group of songs by modern composers, men who are writing to-day, American, English, etc. After these four groups I like to make a short break, an intermission, before starting with the second half of the program. I usually begin it with an opera air in French; then I sing some English, Irish or Scotch songs, and after that present a third group of Japanese folk songs—and there are some lovely Japanese folk songs—singing them in Japanese. I like to conclude my program with my *Madame Butterfly* aria. More important than anything else in recital is for you really to love your audience. If you love your audience your audience will love you and your singing.

### ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESS

“And you want me to tell you what I think is the most important thing for the girl who wishes to succeed vocally to bear in mind? Well, she must sing in tune, and in time and have good, clear diction, that stands to reason. But what is more, as I see it, is for her to be able to give *meaning* to every tone she sings, *expression!*

## TAMAKI MIURA

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Without expression the loveliest tone in the world amounts to nothing, just nothing at all. And the singer's expression must be absolutely natural. She must be living whatever she is singing at the moment—and this holds good for the song sung on the recital stage just as well as for the operatic rôle."









SIGRID ONEGIN

## SIGRID ONEGIN

SIGRID ONEGIN, the great contralto, offers the example, perhaps unique, of a famous *prima donna* who really prefers the concert field in which she won her first laurels, to the operatic stage where she is identified with the greatest alto rôles. In a quiet chat with the artist in her New York hotel she revealed some of the reasons for this preference, and gave many valuable constructive details regarding her dual art.

### WHY THE OPERATIC CONTRALTO IS RARE

"People are very apt to dwell on the lovely quality of the contralto voice," said Mme. Onegin. "They compare it to the 'cello among instruments and speak of its emotional power and effect. Yet the operatic contralto is comparatively rare. Why? Well, she never has the more brilliant, showy rôles that go as a matter of course to the soprano. That is why one cannot

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blame the mezzo who prefers to develop her voice upward, into the region of soprano brilliancy and greater recognition rather than downward, into the tragic alto register.]

“For the alto rôles in opera are the tragic, the gloomy ones. And the great rôles are very few in number. The Amneris in Verdi’s ‘Aïda,’ the Azucena in his ‘T troubadour,’ the Dalila in Saint-Saëns’ ‘Samson,’ the Orfeo in Gluck’s ‘Orfeo,’ and there—in spite of Gluck’s beautiful music, the larger public does not really care for the opera—the action is limited to two characters and the alto does not come on the stage until the third act. What is there besides? Ulrica in the ‘Masked Ball,’ and a few more. The really great opera rôles are the property of the soprano. And then the alto usually represents some disagreeable character. One cannot really blame the general public because it does not approve of the hateful, depraved or perverse operatic characters the alto is so often called upon to represent.

“Take that horrid alto person Herodias, in Strauss’ ‘Salome,’ or Klytemnestra, who is so fiercely tragic and gloomy and evil that the pub-

lic hates her! Or the mean and vicious Ortrud in 'Lohengrin'! The poor alto is usually the 'villainess' in opera, and finds it hard to awaken the public's sympathies.

### THE ALTO TIMBRE

"Yet, in my opinion, the worst thing the natural alto can do is to attempt the high dramatic rôles and force the register upward in the direction of the externally more rewarding vocal rôles. The alto's choicest, most distinctive beauty is in the timbre, the peculiar tone-color and quality of her voice. I have, of course, a three octave range and a little over, but I have always felt that I should avoid anything which would injure my contralto timbre. At the last Munich *Festspiele* they begged me to sing Isolda and Die Walküre. It was not a question of my not being able to do so. A good operatic alto could sing these rôles. But I would not. I felt the risk of injuring my contralto timbre, of losing beauty of tone color, of growing sharp and shrill vocally was not worth taking. Helene Wildbrunn—I think she is the best of present-day Brünnhildes and Isoldas—



## THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA

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was an alto, but in her case the change to the higher dramatic register seems legitimate because she was naturally a high alto to begin with, not a contralto. But in general it is the solid, heavy, powerful soprano voice which is meant to sing Isolde, Kundry and Brünnhilde. Of course, I have sung Carmen—I made my *début* in opera in this rôle—but this original mezzo part leans more naturally to the alto than to the higher range, and when a soprano sings it all the high notes are added or alternative ones. The original rôle is *punktiert*, as we say in German. The real contralto timbre is like the color of the eyes—it cannot be changed; and its musical color is not the one required for the high dramatic rôles in opera.

### SINGING IN CONCERT VERSUS SINGING IN OPERA

“To me opera singing and concert singing are absolutely and entirely distinct. In Europe, in general, a very strict line of division is drawn between the opera and the concert singer. Concert singing is regarded as a loftier and finer type

of art and more is demanded of the artist. For instance, if an opera singer, no matter how famous, gives a *Lieder* recital, critics and public judge her strictly as a *Lieder* singer. No amount of operatic fame or prestige will help her on the concert stage or influence the judgment of those who listen to her. She is considered only on her merits as a concert artist and—if her work is not what it should be—is judged with especial severity for overstepping the sharp line of differentiation drawn between the two styles.

### STRICTLY INDIVIDUAL ARTS

“Concert singing, one might say, has some resemblance to miniature in painting. It is an art of fine shading, of delicate nuance. One perfected little individual art work succeeds another. Opera singing, on the other hand, has a similarity to the larger dimensions, massed color effects and broad, sweeping lines of the big oil paintings. Suppose you have some great historical canvas or a spreading landscape. The effects—compared to the miniature—are coarser, broader. There are sweeping effects of atmospheric dis-

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tance, of dramatic breadth of which the more intimate beauty of concert song does not admit.

“A rôle like that of Klytemnestra is cast in great, broad vocal lines, and if *too many details* in shading are introduced you run the risk of killing the character of your impersonation. I found this the case, myself. In working out with the greatest care and detail every phrase and shading of the part I found that the very perfection of detail weakened the stage effect of the rôle, tended to rob Klytemnestra of her operatic personality.

“To me concert singing is the more subtle, the more finished art. And I think of it as a strictly separate development.

### TRAINING HINTS FROM A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

“I studied for five years before I began to sing in public, two and a half years in Italy, with Ranieri, two and a half years in Germany, with Weiss, which is not too much because Lilli Lehmann demands seven years’ study of each pupil. Speaking out of my own experience, I should

say that any vocal student could begin to work seriously at sixteen—and, since the voice is still developing at that age—put in a solid year's work on breath exercises and breath control. Another thing; I believe the singer who is preparing for a public career should have her big rôles in opera or her big concert repertoire thoroughly prepared in every detail before she makes her first appearance.

“It is a great advantage for a student—at least I have found it so—to have teachers each of whom supplements the other. Professor de Ranieri, of the Milan Conservatory, a fine exponent of real *bel canto* singing, developed my vocal flexibility and agility and especially my trills. Robert Eugen Weiss, of the Munich *Musikakademie*, with whom I worked the first two and a half years, laid the greatest stress on the perfect interpretation of the German *Lied*.

“As to practice? I give an hour a day to technical work, and particularly to slow scales, as Lilli Lehmann teaches them. And, of course, trills, coloratura and so forth. Even when I am singing in opera I never neglect my exercises—

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it seems as natural to do them as to brush my teeth.

### IDEALS OF CONCERT SINGING

“I did not go from opera to the concert stage, but from the concert stage to opera, and perhaps this has helped to keep the two arts very distinct in my mind. Max von Schillings had heard me sing Bach—the ‘G minor Mass,’ the ‘St. Matthew’s Passion’—at a great Bach festival, and at once insisted that I sing in opera. He was so insistent, in fact, that without any too much preliminary work I straightway made my *début* as Carmen. Since then I have always sung on both stages. For me the concert stage in particular has certain ideals.

### PREPARING A PROGRAM

“The concert singer, I think, cannot be too careful in selecting the songs to which her quality of voice, her temperament, will lend the maximum of beauty and effect. For instance, when first I prepared a program of Hugo Wolf songs, I went over *all* that Hugo Wolf had composed with



my accompanist. It took three or four days. Then, out of his many, many songs I chose the fifty which seemed best for me, musically and vocally. These fifty, by careful going over, I reduced to twenty-five or so. And a third and final examination left the eighteen or twenty songs which made up the program. After that I began the work of filing, polishing and perfecting. In one way it is not so difficult, since I read at sight with great ease. When I run through a song three times I know it by heart. I have applied the same process to Brahms and other composers.

### LANGUAGE, PERSONALITY, ACCOMPANIST

"I do not give much thought to language because I have always sung naturally in Swedish, Italian, German, French and English. I think English a decidedly good singing language. My attention was first drawn to it from that standpoint by a performance I heard of 'Hamlet' in London, where a fine actor gave the Shakespearian words their full share of sonority.

"The concert singer's personality must be

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marked, yet not obtrusive. It is not an operative one. In Europe the opera aria sung with piano accompaniment is not popular. It introduces a personality equation, foreign to the concert stage. There the view is: if the composer has created certain music to be sung with orchestra, then it must not be presented without orchestral color and atmosphere.

“I probably would have appeared here with Mr. Boos had he not been traveling with Miss Hempel, so Michael Raucheisen, one of the best of living German pianists, accompanies me.

“When it comes to movement on the concert stage I feel that the singer should use restraint and tact. A natural, spontaneous movement, here and there, may emphasize the meaning of a song. But it must be born of the feeling of the moment. The less ‘drilling’ in gesture the better.

### COSTUME

“Costumes? I know the ‘costume recital’ is popular and, no doubt, there is a great deal to be said for it. But in Europe, generally speaking, the fancy costume for certain songs or groups of

songs is unknown. You will not see it in Scandinavia, Germany and Austria, Italy and Czechoslovakia. The dividing line between the *Lieder* singer, the singer of art songs and the *variété* singer is very sharply drawn, and elaborate fancy costumes at once place the artist in the 'variety' class, so far as the audience is concerned. Of course, this does not apply to an example of artistic impersonation, such as Frieda Hempel gives us in her fine 'Jenny Lind,' where the costume is a necessary and legitimate part of the artistic *ensemble*.

"My personal feeling in the matter is that dress on the concert stage must be unobtrusive. The singer is only a medium of musical expression; she must be as simple and direct as possible. She should not overemphasize the detail of dress, distract attention from her music. That is my personal view.

"I arrange my programs chronologically and find my very large repertoire a great help in giving that well-balanced variety of the gay and serious, the tender and the tragic which lends life and contrast. But to be successful you must first of

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all really love to sing—the public soon realizes whether you do or do not. There are two main things, I think—since you ask me to specify—which every young girl who wishes to become a singer should bear in mind; first, to be absolutely sincere in all she does artistically; second, not to cultivate too great hopes, not to nourish too many illusions!”







To Frederick H. Martens  
With sincere good wishes.

Rosa Ponselle

Nov. 22/1922.

*WILLIS REE*  
19

ROSA PONSELLE

## ROSA PONSELLE

ROSA PONSELLE, that admirable artist who, both as a dramatic *prima donna* soprano and as a concert singer has impressed her art and her personality so powerfully on present-day American audiences, holds well-defined and positive opinions on some of those important points which are of interest to the girl who hopes to attain the higher rungs of the ladder of vocal success. The views and ideas which Miss Ponselle has been kind enough to express to the writer are the outcome of a vocal experience which has justified itself beyond all shadow of doubt.

“First of all,” said Miss Ponselle, “I regard singing purely as a mental operation—that is, the *art* of singing. For the girl who is a student of opera in the higher sense, mechanical exercises cannot well be advised, because vocal mechanics do not enter into singing as an *art*. Too many students, I think, definitely fix their

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ambitions on opera, when they begin to study singing, before they find out whether or no they are fitted for it. When you begin to study singing, let your first thought be to learn how to sing. And then, if later you feel drawn toward opera, make sure that you possess the requisite qualifications for an operatic career. I know that in my own case I began to study singing without any fixed determination to become an opera singer.

### AN AMERICAN TRAINING

“Yes, my own training has been altogether American—one hundred per cent, as the phrase is—and if you insist that this is proof of the fact that a *prima donna* can be developed in the United States I do not very well see how I can contradict you. I cannot honestly say that I have ever regretted not having studied with European teachers. William Thorner was my teacher, and all that I may have gained in the way of voice production and flexibility, singing poise and tone development, I owe to him. There seems little advantage to the student in recommending this,

that or the other set of *vocalises* or exercises for study use. After all, if you get down to the gist of the matter, it is altogether a question of the proper use of the exercises selected; *how* to study what you study and not *what* you study.

### SOME LESSONS OF PRIMA DONNA EXPERIENCE

“I spent less than a year preparing for opera, but when you ask me how I managed to accomplish so much in a time so comparatively short, the answer is simple. I was studious—working with my mind as well as with my throat—and I had had correct teaching from the *very beginning*, and therefore no faulty teaching to undo. One thing in which I am a great believer is the avoidance of vocal overexertion. During the opera or concert season I use daily vocal exercises to keep my voice flexible; but I practice them only a *few minutes* each day—and during my vacation I give myself a complete rest. Even while I was preparing to sing in opera, I did not practice more than fifteen or twenty minutes a day; unless, of course, I was studying a new

rôle. The pronouncedly coloratura rôles, as I see it, do not properly lie within the range of the dramatic soprano voice; but there is no earthly reason why the dramatic soprano cannot sing purely lyric rôles, and sing them well. As regards the actual dramatics of the stage, the singer's dramatic action, I do not think it can ever be prepared, that is *completely* prepared, before stage presentation; though, of course, it should be studied. My own belief and practice is to allow stage action to depend to a great extent on spontaneous interpretation. If the artist thoroughly identifies herself with her rôle in an opera, her stage action will be the natural outcome of her impersonation. It will express itself with a sincerity and conviction which the most painstaking study will not give.

"No, I would not attempt to draw comparisons, as regards difficulty, between one and another operatic rôle of the dramatic soprano repertory. Technical as well as musical difficulties are so largely individual. I could not say that Leonora, for instance, is a rôle more difficult to sing than that of Elvira. My own experience is



that *all rôles require the same mental exertion in order to render the motif in its best light!*

“For the student who wishes to become a dramatic soprano one first requisite is absolutely essential. She must have dramatic talent as a basis. No particular line of study will develop a dramatic soprano if this natural aptitude and instinct be missing. On the other hand, I am so strong a believer in individuality in art, and especially in the art of song, that I do not think it possible to specify limitations as regards vocal and dramatic interpretation where the dramatic soprano is concerned. Each singer has her own natural limitations, and another cannot specify them for her. She must do so herself, and be her own judge as to how far she may go and what she may do. As regards the studying of soprano rôles or songs which the singer, for some one reason or other, may be doubtful of carrying to success, there is a very simple and logical rule, one which I follow myself: *I have never studied any rôle to which I did not believe I could do justice.*

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## SINGING IN CONCERT

“There is, basically, no difference—so far as I can see—in the way the voice is used or projected on the boards of the opera and on the recital platform. I sing on the concert stage just as I do in opera. I use my voice in the same manner, always, and with no mental reservations in projecting it.

“As for programs, I study my audiences and give what their applause indicates they would like to have by way of encore numbers. I always include at least two operatic arias in my programs, because I believe that in cities where grand opera is not presented, my audiences desire to hear me in the rôles I sing during the opera season. Yet I believe that, after all, it is the old heart-to-heart ballads, the simple emotional songs, which any audience loves best. I have noticed that there is always more feeling in the response to these songs.

“The great essential in concert singing, and the one without which the singer cannot succeed, is the ability to render a song in a *convincing*

## ROSA PONSELLE

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manner. Unless the concert singer can convince, can move her audience, make it feel that her art is genuine and whole-souled, her other, more purely vocal gifts, no matter how great they may be, will not count. And, if you wish me to give a message to the ambitious girl students of singing as—to use your own words—‘a successful *prima donna*,’ the best I can give them is this: *Be sure of proper guidance in the initial stages when you study singing!* And this applies to every student, whether she have the opera or the concert stage ultimately in view.”









ROSA RAISA

AS NORMA IN "NORMA"

## ROSA RAISA

ROSA RAISA, the great dramatic soprano, is another of those singers who control with equal mastery the broad line of operatic vocal impersonation, and the more delicate and elusive art of the concert platform. The lessons of so outstanding an artistic success as hers are well worth marking by all who aspire to the heights of vocal fame, and the valuable hints which she gave the writer when he called on her at her Chicago hotel, are worth noting by every student.

"One teacher, but a good one," said Rosa Raisa, "should be enough to develop the young singer if the latter can supply the voice worth developing. My own tradition of singing and vocal study is entirely Italian, and Barbara Marchisio, with whom I worked in the San Pietro Conservatory at Maiella, near Naples, was one of the finest exemplars of the true Italian *bel canto*. Though an old, old woman, she could

illustrate vocally, in a clear and beautiful voice, any lesson she wished to impart, and I owe my entire training to her splendid musicianship. Hence, speaking out of my own experience, I should advise the student to intrust herself to one teacher, always providing that it be the right teacher. One teacher such as it was my own good fortune to have, is better than a long succession of less qualified vocal masters.

### THE STUDENT SHOULD HAVE A DEFINITE AIM

“I believe that it would be well for every singer to have a clear idea of what she is aiming for, what she intends to be. A girl who aspires to opera, in my opinion, should have that end definitely in view when she begins to study singing. If she is always aware of the fact, subconsciously, that she is working to make a place for herself on the operatic stage; if she has a fixed ambition for the musical drama from the start, she can coördinate all her energies toward that end as she advances, and concentrating on it will save her time. If, on the other hand, a girl is fairly certain

that her gifts are not in the direction of opera, that she can win greater and more immediate success on the concert platform, let her make the latter her objective. If your ambitions are operatic—and it is well to be sure that your voice, personality and musicianship hold out some promise of success in an operatic career—then throw yourself heart and soul into your vocal work with that idea in mind. It is worth remembering that it is easier to move from the opera to the concert platform than to reverse the process. There are a number of incidental factors in opera—acting, dramatic movement, make-up, costume, singing with orchestra—which play no part in recital singing. These things require intensive study and much practical experience to master.] To the concert singer who has never sung in opera they are so unfamiliar that it is difficult for her to adapt herself to them. On the other hand, the opera singer—for all that she is robbed of her accessories of scenery, action, costume and orchestra—gains a freedom and self-control on the opera stage which tends to make her entirely at ease on the concert platform.

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Whichever your aim may be, however, keep that aim constantly in mind, and remember that you can succeed only by means of determination. I began to study singing with my mind made up to sing in opera, but this has not prevented my singing in concert as well.

### DAILY VOICE EXERCISE

“Of course, the technical material for daily vocal exercises is much the same for every one who studies singing: scales, sustained note exercises and coloratura passage work, to keep the voice flexible. I believe, and I practice what I preach, that every singer should give at least a half an hour every morning to purely technical exercises. But—a most important point in technical exercise is to use *the right quality of voice*. The *mezza voce* quality, the medium tone, is the best to use in daily practice. Using this tone quality with *crescendos* and *decrescendos*, you will secure far better results than by singing *forte*, for if you practice *forte* a good deal, you may easily fall into the habit of unconsciously straining the voice. Remember, too, to use the



speaking voice softly, to talk *mezza voce*, for if the speaking voice is strained or loud, it cannot help but react on the vocal cords.

### THE DRAWBACKS OF SPECIALIZATION FOR THE SOPRANO

“Officially I am labeled a ‘dramatic soprano,’ but in reality the distinctions drawn between lyric, dramatic and coloratura soprano often appear quite unnecessary to me. If the so-called ‘lyric soprano’ can sing rapid passage-work, *fioritura* and embellishments with ease and *bravura*, then she is also a coloratura soprano. And if a dramatic soprano, in addition to dramatic style and delivery, has an instinct for the pure lyric song-line, then she is a ‘lyric soprano’ as well. If you have the voice, the tone quality and the range, there is no reason why you cannot combine all three styles. Our whole age is one of specialization in art, science and literature, and like all things, specialization may be overdone. My training in the rôles of the older Italian coloratura operas, the scores of Rossini and Donizetti, has not prevented my singing the lyric rôles of

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modern French or the dramatic rôles of modern Italian opera. On the contrary, if the singer is enough of an artist, if she has the voice and the temperament to adapt herself to the various styles, she should be able to sing the better in any one of them for being at home in the others. So, as I see it, the *real* soprano, the artist who has voice and musicianship, should be able to sing every kind of soprano rôle, as they did in the old *bel canto* days; she should be as much at ease in Lucia or Gilda as in Michaela or Margherita. Of course, there are certain soprano rôles which may be technically and musically within a singer's reach, but in which the character she would have to represent is repellent to her. Thus, I would never sing Salome, because of the disgusting subject.

### THE DRAMATIC FACTOR IN AN OPERATIC RÔLE

"How do I study a new operatic rôle? First of all, the artist, of course, must put herself thoroughly in touch with the character she represents, and the period in which that character

moves and has her being. She must know the history and the people of the epoch, their thoughts and outlook on life; and her costume should not be a mere seventeenth- or eighteenth-century disguise draped over a twentieth-century personality. Then comes the study of the music, and in connection with the music the question of acting arises. I have quite definite views on this subject. The artist who sings with a feeling and an emotion proceeding naturally out of her inner artistic consciousness, need not necessarily study the dramatics of a rôle. The trouble with conscious study of stage action and dramatic movement is that when it is carried out in practice it has no spontaneity, and does not make the natural, unconstrained effect desired. The stage dramatization of whatever you are singing should come naturally out of the words of your song. The unstudied, the spontaneous is what you must strive for, and how can anything too carefully 'studied' make an 'unstudied' impression? The same thing applies, in my opinion, to motion on the concert stage. I use it but little, for the atmosphere, the tradition and the musical scheme

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of the concert stage are undramatic so far as bodily movement is concerned. There you must put your drama into your voice. On the other hand, I do not go to the extreme which some artists advocate, and rigorously ban the operatic aria from my recital programs. Many opera arias are just as distinctly individual songs, may just as appropriately be sung independent of their existence in the opera score, as any other song. And then, if you are an opera singer, your public—except in the largest cities—expects an opera air from you. I have never been able to see anything inartistic in the inclusion of the opera air in the concert program, if it is introduced with a sense for musical effect and contrast. My experience has convinced me that my concert audiences like to have me sing an opera air, and I always do so rather than disappoint them.

### A FEW RULES FOR SUCCESS

“I believe the very first thing essential to success either in opera or on the concert stage, is the determination to succeed. Hold fast to two ideals: to become a great singer and to study

## ROSA RAISA

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hard. And then, in connection with concentrated work, there are a few other things to remember. The singer, student or professional, should lead a well-regulated, methodical life, she should talk sparingly—this is of great importance, though not much is said about it as a rule—she must eat plain food, go to bed early, cultivate fresh air as much as possible, and do daily bodily exercise, for daily physical exercise, which keeps your body in good trim, also keeps the physical mediums of voice production on a level with your bodily health in general. And, finally, keep in mind three things: perseverance, which overcomes all obstacles; forbearance, which often makes difficulties easy in human relations; and courage to discount the inevitable setbacks and disappointments from which no artistic career is exempt.”









ELIZABETH RETHBERG

## ELIZABETH RETHBERG

PERHAPS one reason for Elizabeth Rethberg's success in opera is that her very extended register, together with her musical intelligence, makes her a well-nigh perfect lyric soprano, dramatic soprano or coloratura soprano, just as on the concert platform she is equally at home in oratorio or the *Lied*. A pleasant chat with the gifted young singer in her comfortable New York apartment offered some interesting viewpoints with regard to various phases of her art.

"I am quite naturally an advocate of beginning to sing early in life, if you intend making singing your career," said Miss Rethberg, "yet I do not think the average student need begin when I did. It happens to be a fact that I could sing—and sing in tune and in time—before I could talk, when I was only a year old. Perhaps this was not strange, because we always had plenty of good music at home. And, growing up with Schubert, Schumann and Brahms, it is not

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surprising that I developed a taste for good music without effort. I began to study the piano when four, and hardly know what I would do as a singer were I not a good pianist. I can always sit down with a new song and get an idea of it as a whole, melody and accompaniment. A knowledge of the piano benefits every vocal student. In song music as in piano music I have always been drawn to the more complex, the more profound. When I first came to know the Beethoven sonatas, for instance, it was the last sonatas which most attracted me. As a girl of seventeen I began to study singing seriously, yet without any fixed idea as to whether I would sing in opera or on the concert platform, for the two forms of vocal art are sharply divided in Germany; a concert singer sings only in concert and an opera singer sings only in opera, as a general rule.

### WHEN TO LEAVE A VOCAL TEACHER

“I left my first vocal teacher in the Dresden Conservatory because my voice was growing smaller and smaller and my throat muscles more



and more contracted. My teacher kept telling me: 'Give yourself time, your voice will come, it will grow larger in power and volume.' But I could trust my own ears, and I heard my voice growing beautifully less right along. So I left the Conservatory and began to study with a pupil of Iffert. The Iffert method and the Iffert exercises are excellent, and I soon noticed an improvement. I sang better and with greater ease. But Iffert is a little timid about deep breathing; his theory is that the breath must be produced without much effort. Now deep breathing, in my opinion, is absolutely essential to big tone. So, when I had convinced myself on this head, I studied and worked out deep breathing exercises myself with excellent results. For a great, firm, ringing tone one must be able to take a very deep breath, a breath that throws up the ribs and chest, and makes you feel as though it came from the very soles of your feet. Breathing of this kind, guided and controlled, is the soul of big-toned singing. When the War broke out my teacher went to the front, and I was afraid to experiment with others. I worked

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intensively by myself, but never went to a teacher again, after I had spent only a single year with this Iffert pupil.

### A DRESDEN DÉBUT

“During this time I had occasion to sing at a concert in Dresden one evening, at which Fritz Reiner, now conductor of the Cincinnati Orchestra, was directing. He was the conductor at the Dresden Opera, and a few days later asked me to come to the opera house on one of the mornings set apart for testing voices for admission to the opera company. There were twenty-seven singers there in all the morning I went, and as a rule these tests are not pleasant. They let you sing a line or two of a song, and then call out, ‘Thank you, that’s enough! Next!’ This did not happen to me, however. I was allowed to sing Michaela’s air from ‘Carmen,’ and an aria from ‘Der Freischütz’ without being stopped, and then was informed that I had been engaged. Strange to say, I could not sign my contract. I was legally a minor, so the contract had to be signed by my father.

“I was delighted to have a chance to sing in opera and, of course, began by singing odd parts and acting as an understudy. There was always a good deal of substituting of every kind to do at the Dresden *Hofoper*, and as I was expected to sing any soprano rôle offered me, lyric, dramatic or coloratura, I had a wonderful training. This may have something to do with the fact that I feel quite at home in any of these three soprano voice types.

“I made my *début* in the Dresden *Hofoper* in 1915, as Arsena in Johann Strauss’ ‘Zigeunerbaron.’ This score is one of the classics of comic opera, and the rôle of Arsena a difficult coloratura part, with an especially effective waltz toward the end. The singer who was to have taken the part fell sick, and by good luck I chanced to be her understudy, and to score a success. After that I sang a number of principal parts in Dresden, and created the rôle of The Empress in ‘Die Frau ohne Schatten,’ by Richard Strauss, in Germany, the first German performance being in Dresden.

## SINGING CONTRASTS BETWEEN MODERN AND OLDER OPERA

“‘Die Frau ohne Schatten,’ by Richard Strauss, is really an opera of which I should approve, because the rôle of The Empress earned me ovations both in Dresden and Berlin. It represented a great personal success to me. But—the book, in which two old East Indian legends have been united in the bonds of an incomprehensible mysticism and theosophy, would tax a metaphysician’s mind to comprehend. The opera singer must be able to thoroughly understand the *psychos* of the character she represents; she must be able to identify herself with the character’s thoughts, motives and whole mental outlook; and the action of the work must have a basis of logical development. This, I think, is missing in ‘Die Frau ohne Schatten.’ Or, if it is there, it is so hidden by subtleties that it is not apparent.

“That, probably, is the reason why, in spite of very lovely musical passages and sections, and beautiful costumes and scenery, the score does

not grip an audience. As I have said, I cannot complain with regard to my personal experience with it, either in Dresden or in Berlin. Technically, the rôles, especially that of The Empress, are very difficult for the singer. First of all a great range is required; then there are tremendous leaps throughout the melodic line, leaps of two octaves. And in the last act, after the singer's voice has been subjected to the greatest strain, she is required to deliver a melodic declamation against the full orchestra, and following this, compelled to sing in the highest position, *pianissimo*, for a long time, never getting away from the high C and its immediate surroundings. Of all the operatic rôles I have ever studied it makes the greatest demands. In fact, the difficulties for all the principals are so great that it is the hardest thing in the world to get a company together to do justice to it.

“In a way this opera points a contrast between the modern German score and the older one. The older Mozart operas and the modern Puccini scores lay much more stress on singability. And they present characters and an action the public



can grasp. They do not attempt dramatic metaphysics or philosophy. While I am musically interested enough to wish to keep in touch with all contemporary modern operatic development, I am quite frank in saying that I prefer Mozart and the Italians to the great moderns in so far as singing is concerned. 'Die Frau ohne Schatten' is a modern fairy opera. If we compare it with Mozart's fairy opera, 'Die Zauberflöte,' I think the latter has more in its favor. It is generally admitted that Mozart's book is not an ideal one. Yet it does not present any abstruse philosophical problems. And in the beautiful Dresden revival in which I sang Pamina, the true fairytale character of the opera was preserved by the cinematographic scenic light effects, which followed each other in swift succession. The most artistic and colorful scenes were projected on the stage by the means of a sublimated magic lantern process, and no time was lost in shifting stage settings. The result was that the audience had a wonderful succession of glowing pictures which drew away attention from the words, at times naïve, and allowed the music to flow on without

a break. And Mozart's coloratura, while anything but easy, is written to sing, the natural possibilities of the voice with regard to melodic movement and range are always kept in mind. I never felt this more keenly than when I sang the rôle of Constanze.

### SPECIFIC TYPES OF VOICE

“Out of my own experience I would say that—provided she have the range and the ability—there is no need for the soprano to confine herself too narrowly to a lyric, dramatic or coloratura style. In German we have a happy expression, *jugendlich dramatisch*, ‘youthfully dramatic,’ which I use as a kind of official label for my own singing voice. You see the ‘youthfully’ might imply that I am young enough to sing either a lyric or a coloratura soprano rôle, while the ‘dramatic’ implies that I am a ‘singing actress.’ I believe that an experience such as mine at the Dresden Opera, where I had to sing anything and everything at a moment's notice, so to speak, is invaluable for any young operatic singer. It compels her to become self-reliant, it stimulates

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her ambition, and forces her to develop her every resource. And as regards the dramatic, the acting in opera, it may be overdone as easily as underdone. After all, the real dramatism in opera lies in the voice. Some artists, of course, feel the dramatic conception more strongly in body than in voice, and as a result express themselves more in physical action. There are moments in rôles where to me acting seems an actual detriment to the presentation of the music. Take the 'Nile' aria in 'Aïda.' When I sang it in Vienna I knew that in order to bring out every beautiful detail of the song, I could not move about much on the stage. I did not do so, and as a result attracted much favorable attention by presenting the aria in 'concert' form, so to speak, placing the dramatic factor entirely in my singing, in tone and phrasing.]

### TRADITION IN OPERA SINGING

"I am opposed to all 'traditional' rendering of operatic rôles. When I study a new rôle for the first time I am careful never to go and see another artist present it, lest unconsciously, I be influ-

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enced by her interpretation. I feel that I must develop my conception of the rôle out of my own understanding of the character.] I should not make a single movement or gesture which does not represent my own personality.] It is quite possible that others may work out an interpretation which at some one point or another is more effective, but my own must represent myself.]

### PRACTICE

“As regards practice, I must admit that my practicing depends a great deal upon my mood. Hardly a day passes without my singing, and during the opera or recital season I usually give a quarter of an hour daily to purely technical work, scales and exercises. No, I never use difficult passages from operatic arias for technical work. Sometimes, if I wish to get my voice into the feeling of a certain style of coloratura, say the Bach type, I sing one or another of Bach’s solo cantatas. On the other hand, though at times I practice little, I may grow so interested in what I am studying that I will sing for hours and actually forget my meals. I am, perhaps, too

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sensitive to music, react too quickly to its influence. I am not a metropolitan, and have that nostalgia for the country which no child of nature ever entirely outgrows. When I was to sign my American contract, I tried to have a clause inserted which would make allowance for homesickness, but of course the management only laughed. When I am not in the mood, I cannot practice. But perhaps this is not a good thing to tell the vocal student, because it offers such an attractive excuse for not working. In my own case I regard this sensitiveness to the mood of the moment as a disadvantage, so far as practicing is concerned.

### SINGING IN CONCERT

“Like every opera singer I use my voice differently on the concert platform. Of the two arts, concert singing is the higher, the more finished, the more truly musical. On the concert platform I feel that face and tone alone express the dramatic element; gesture seems quite out of place to me. The music itself, style, finish in detail come first. I think first of the music and do not



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try to act—whatever is dramatic in songs must be phrased and expressed in tone. No gestures, but perfect calm is essential to the highest art on the concert platform.

### THE CONCERT PLATFORM

“In general I use the chronological scheme, like most concert singers, in arranging my programs. The opera aria has no real place on the concert program, but in the smaller European towns where they have no opera, they like to hear an opera air, so I usually sing one as an encore. As I am told that American audiences feel the same way, in the cities where opera is not given, I shall probably do the same thing here. Naturally, I have always programmed German *Lieder* largely. I have sung programs made up of, say four groups, Schubert, Schumann, Richard Strauss and Hugo Wolf; or again, have sung entire programs of songs by one composer, Schubert, Wolf, Brahms or Strauss. Here, of course, I expect to sing a number of songs in English, Italian and French.

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## A LAST WORD OF ADVICE

“I think I may safely give every ambitious young student of singing one bit of advice founded on my own experience. The first is, to carry out her own ideas, not to be too largely influenced by others, to remain objective and in control of her personality. In preparing for my career, I acted against the advice of my parents and friends in leaving a teacher who was injuring my voice. I did so because my every feeling and instinct told me that I would lose my voice if I did not do so. And I was justified by events. Certain questions no one can decide for the student; she must decide them for herself, and once she is thoroughly convinced that she is doing the thing which is best for her, she should set all other opinion aside and do it.”





ERNESTINE SCHUMANN HEINK

## ERNESTINE SCHUMANN HEINK

WHO could be better qualified to give the vocal student valuable constructive advice with regard to the art of song than Madame Ernestine Schumann Heink who, at the age of sixty-one—and, remarkable woman that she is, she alludes to it with a frank smile!—still delights the public by a practical showing forth of what great art in song really is? An hour spent with the artist in the pleasant sun parlor of her home in Garden City—the grass was still green without and the golden autumn leaves still clung to the trees—was productive of lessons drawn from her own experience which the girl singer who wishes to emulate her example will do well to heed.

### WHEN TO BEGIN AND HOW TO STUDY

“The young girl who wishes to become a professional singer, whether in opera or on the concert stage,” said Madame, “can begin to study seriously as soon as her physical develop-



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ment is complete. This means when the vocal organs, the voice-producing apparatus—if you wish to call it that—is ready. And right here, at the very beginning, the foundation of success or the seed of failure may be laid or sown. A girl who has a good natural voice may easily have it ruined by a poor teacher, one who tries to bring it out in accordance with some pedantic method or theory of instruction, instead of studying her individual vocal possibilities. Especially in its early stages, the natural voice cannot be handled too carefully. It may have all sorts of possibilities of range, quality and sweetness; but these must be developed with the greatest care. Over-training, overforcing, overdrilling actually kill many a good voice before it is born, so to speak.

### BREATHING THE FOUNDATION OF ALL GOOD SINGING

“Breathing is the foundation of all good singing. Breathe right and you will sing right. Keep your bronchial tubes clean and clear. Never, *never* swallow phlegm or mucous matter when you have a cold!—I might as well be frank about

a disgusting habit which is altogether too widespread—and remember that the throat can stand a bath as well as the body. A clear, healthy condition of the vocal tubes, an absence of any impediment to breath production is absolutely essential if you want to develop a good tone. And, given good breathing (which implies a good natural tone) see that your teacher understands your individuality as a singer. A poor teacher may easily force the student's natural register so that her high tones are shrill, or her lower ones so that they are rough and hoarse. Other teachers, again, develop the voice so that there is a gap between the registers. If your higher notes and your lower ones are not properly connected during the early training years, this gap becomes more and more noticeable as time goes on. And, later, you cannot close it up again. Another thing, the voice which has been forced during early training will not last out. Concert and opera singers with a deceptively large volume of tone—I will mention no names, but there have been several notable examples during the past

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ten or twelve years—suddenly find their voices ‘have gone back on them,’ while I, at sixty-one . . .” Madame smiled, and left her sentence unfinished, knowing, no doubt, that the laurels of public favor she continues to pluck are there for all to see.

### HOW AND WHAT TO PRACTICE

“I think all voice training should be individual. I loathe methods. All vocal students have one fault in common—they want to push ahead too fast. But the principle of light and easy vocal training, especially at the start, avoidance of all strain, will bring a girl ahead far more quickly than plugging away with too much energy. A couple of lessons a week; they need not be longer than twenty minutes or half an hour; and seeing that she does her home practice at different times, each period of work lasting no more than twenty or twenty-five minutes, makes a sufficient study ration for the beginning student. I myself was brought up on Concone and scales and—unlike so many girls nowadays—my voice was not spoiled by singing away at songs before my register was

properly rounded out and developed. For vocal *practice* the *mezza voce* is the thing. What I would say to every girl who wants to become a singer is: strain away, force your voice, if you insist on doing so, but do not expect to preserve it beyond middle life! A voice is a living organism, but it will wear out, just like a piano. Yet it will not wear out from use, but rather from abuse. A valuable part of early training is learning to read easily and freely by sight. It develops a taste for good music if the right material be chosen.

“When I studied with Franz Wüllner in Dresden, I practiced sight reading by singing the parts of four-part religious chorals, soprano, alto, tenor and bass, *in my own register*, of course, and I gained a great deal from doing so. But allowing pupils who are not ripe for them to study songs of every sort, including opera arias, which is so often done by teachers who do not know their business, is a great and widespread evil. When this is done, it is quite impossible for the teacher to observe how the student’s tone is developing.

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## THE MIDDLE ALTO REGISTER

“Of course, the contralto student works somewhat differently from the soprano, because of the natural break in her voice. The true, genuine alto has no natural high range, but if her training is begun early enough, there is no reason why she should not develop a small upper register. Slow, unstrained practice of the scales is the best means of developing the alto tone down to G and F of the octave below the middle C. The genuine contralto voice should have no break in its *middle* register; while the mezzo soprano voice has a break in its chest tones. The secret of true art in alto singing is to cultivate the too often neglected middle register. It should be done by singing in the middle voice down to the lowest tones. Do not cultivate your high and low register and leave them ‘up in the air,’ unconnected. I can sing the chest-tone A in Ortrud without any forcing. Always remember that if the chest tones are forced the high notes are bound to suffer, and *vice versa*.



“When I first sang for Madame Cosima Wagner in Bayreuth I had not perfected my *piano* singing and *mezza forte* voice. She said to me regretfully: ‘Ah, my dear Erda (that was what she called me), if you only could sing *piano* and *pianissimo*!’ I went away and worked and practiced until I had accomplished my aim. With Sucher and Gustave Mahler I studied Wagner parts. Franz Wüllner and Hans von Bulow taught me the great Mozart arias, and from Johannes Brahms I learned how to sing his own songs and rhapsodies—wonderful teachers. And even to-day my chest tones are, properly speaking, middle tones *developed downward*! They are unstrained, unforced, and that is what they must be if you wish to keep your middle voice until you are an old singer. It is terrible to hear a young girl sing who bellows out her chest tones like a calf, or megaphones them as though she were using a foghorn. And these foghorn notes cannot, do not last. They simply wear themselves out and—the first thing you know the voice is gone!

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## SAUCE FOR THE PRIMA DONNA IS SAUCE FOR THE CONCERT SINGER

*"Prima donna!* I hate the word. A singer is a singer, and a great singer is a great singer, an artist, whether she sings in opera or on the concert stage, or both. And—the same rules apply to all singers who wish to have a good title to the name. They are all merely a matter of sane, simple and natural living. An artist's life need not be an unnatural one. I cannot see why she should be regarded as forming a member of a special caste. Every student's singing and every artist's art benefits if she moves about, walks about, exercises, interests herself in all the natural interests of life like any one else. When I am at home I enjoy my garden, my home, I dust, I iron, I wash—yes, wash—and I take pride in cooking a good dinner. Artistic temperament? Bah! That is another overworked phrase. I get angry sometimes, all of us do," said Madame, and her eyes twinkled, "but I do not call it 'artistic temperament.'

GESTURE IN OPERA AND ON THE CONCERT  
STAGE

“Yes, we singers are just like any other women—or should be. And when I hear young girls complain of a lack of ‘artistic environment’ I look back on the days when I studied my Wagnerian rôles while I was watching the children’s dinner cook on the kitchen stove. On tour I never neglect my scales—they are my daily exercise bread—and I practice them every day to keep my voice flexible. Gesture on the concert stage? I do not believe in it. Take the opera aria. When it is sung on the concert stage, it is taken from its dramatic setting. When sung in concert the dramatic element should lie solely in the music. You cannot project it operatically without all the accessories which make gesture natural and logical—costume, stage decoration, the presence of other principals and secondary characters. My ideal of song interpretation in concert is dignity, a quiet dignity which allows the *voice* to touch and move the audience. Hold nothing in your hands. Use the *mezza voce* in

order to give greater power and meaning to your climaxes of tone. The face may legitimately aid in expressing the meaning of your song and, perhaps, if they are entirely natural, and born of the movement and character of the song itself, a few simple, expressive gestures. But they should be used sparingly and, to my mind, all profusion of gesture destroys the effect of songs sung on the recital platform. A concert singer who cannot sing a simple lyric song with conviction and who cannot 'put it over' without gestures is not a good concert singer. When a gesture comes—and it will occasionally—as a spontaneous emotional reflex, for I know in my own case when I have sung 'Out Where the West Begins,' I have quite unconsciously thrown out my arms, simply because all that my own beautiful Western home means to me came into my mind, it seems to me it is justified, but not otherwise.

### THE DEMANDS OF THE RECITAL VERSUS THOSE OF OPERA

"The recital stage demands more of the singer than the opera stage. She has no orchestra, no

scenery. She must deliver her vocal goods all by herself. And the concert stage spoils the singer for opera. It takes away her self-confidence for great dramatic things. At home, in private, I can sing any of my Wagnerian rôles from beginning to end. I can let out my voice and enjoy it, sing them just as I did at the Metropolitan. But on the concert stage, no! Brangäne, Erda, Waltraute, parts of them, yes, but not the whole rôle. And then, too, I would like people to remember me as the opera singer I was when I sang in opera. I want them to keep the memories that their imagination holds dear. I do not—as others have done—wish to appear again on the operatic stage, and imagine people whispering to each other: ‘Yes, I recall her ten years ago. You should have heard her *then!*’ ”

The bell rang at this juncture, and four up-standing young delegates of an American Legion post—their errand at Madame’s home may easily be imagined—made their appearance. Regretting the further valuable facts which their arrival prevented him from gleaning from the great singer the writer took his departure.









ALICE VERLET

AS MANON IN MASSENET'S "MANON"

## ALICE VERLET

Mlle. ALICE VERLET, the distinguished lyric coloratura soprano of the Paris *Grand Opéra*, whom Massenet mentions among the interpreters of his rôles in his *Souvenirs*, talked to the writer in her comfortable New York studio of how to sing and what to sing, in opera and recital. She spoke from the standpoint of the French *prima donna* and concert singer, whose art has been developed along classic French and Italian traditions and in the course of her conversation stressed many points of practical value to the American student of song.

"Perhaps my experience has been different from that of many other singers in that I had but one teacher," said Mlle. Verlet. "I began to study seriously when I was no more than fourteen, in Brussels, and my teacher was Mme. Moriani, who combined in her teaching methods the traditions of the French school and the older Italian one of Garcia, which produced Grisi and

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Malibran; and I made my operatic *début* four years later, at the Paris *Opéra-Comique*, in 'Les Noces de Jeanette.' Mme. Moriani had one great virtue as a teacher—she developed the voice naturally and without forcing. She was opposed to all driving, said that every vocal student must use nine tenths brain power and only one tenth voice power in her work, and laid stress on letting the voice grow and develop without straining.

### A NATURAL VOCAL DEVELOPMENT

"There is, as a rule, far too much crowding and driving in vocal teaching to-day. I am speaking out of my own experience, as a vocal student, and as a teacher and as an artist, when I say that practicing too long at a time is a most dangerous error. One should begin by singing five minutes at a time and making a pause; then, always ten minutes, pausing, then twenty, and, finally half an hour. At the most the student should not sing, all told, more than an hour or an hour and a half a day with three or four pauses. And the operatic student in particular, must not be ambitious at the expense of her voice. And, aside



from strain there is the matter of vocal endurance. At eighteen I could have sung one or two of the big arias in Massenet's 'Manon,' with orchestra, but not the entire opera score, the same evening. The standard Italian *vocalises*, especially those of Garcia—Mme. Moriani was accustomed to make changes in them to suit the individual qualities of voice of her pupils—if properly used, probably answer every purpose of natural voice placing and development. Initiative in the vocal student is all very well, later on, but in the formative period of voice training the teacher is all-important. And a good teacher should have no hard and fixed rules of procedure. Every student has a different larynx, a different diaphragm, different vocal cords. Every individual voice has a different quality and different possibilities, and the only good vocal teacher is the one who tries to bring out the individuality of the individual voice.

### SINGING AND STUDYING HEAVY RÔLES TOO SOON

“One common fault of the operatic student is that she sings and studies rôles which are too

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heavy for her voice too soon, thus injuring her vocal cords by putting an unwarranted strain on them. When I first made my *début* I sang the lighter coloratura rôles; I knew the more difficult ones would come in time. But putting a girl of eighteen or twenty through the heavy Wagnerian rôles, for instance, as is often done, sometimes paralyzes the vocal cords and ruins her voice. The *gradual* development of vocal strength is the only safe and sure way to attain it. And 'gradual' does not mean two hours' work a day without stopping—that is, unless the student is as strong as an ox, and even then there is the danger of her voice becoming hard and losing charm, and charm is, perhaps, the greatest of all vocal qualities, both in opera and in recital.

### DAILY EXERCISES

"And whether the advanced student is singing in opera or in recital, or preparing to sing in either, daily exercises in mechanism should never be neglected. Every morning I have kept up the habit of going over my exercises. Even on days when I was singing in opera I always ran over a

few before the performance. The voice must be kept flexible, especially if one has to sing big rôles. I have inherited some simple mechanical exercises from Mme. Moriani which, in my opinion, cannot be improved upon—scales, three, four, and six-note passages, *gruppettos*, trills, *staccati* and *arpeggios*, and so on—which are purely technical, and which I always use. If daily exercise is consistently followed out, flexibility becomes a vocal habit.

### NOISE VERSUS TONE

“One curious present-day feature of singing in public is the confusing of noise and tone. The use of a full, rounded, yet soft and charming *piano* or *mezza voce* tone, so necessary for shading and contrast, is discouraged in favor of a big, noisy one, even though it be harsh, metallic or wooden. I tried to explain to one student who came to me, a girl with a wooden voice, how essentially the development of a beautiful *piano* tone really was. And what do you suppose she said? ‘Why, no manager would think of engaging me if I sang so softly!’ I think one reason this mis-

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taken idea is propagated in owing to the various small Italian opera companies who tour the country and who, rightly or wrongly, and probably the latter, imagine that out-of-town audiences insist, as your American slang says, on 'an earful' of music for their money.

### SOME GRAND OPERA RÔLES

"Like Lilli Lehmann (and all the great singers of the past), I first sang *opéra comique* rôles, light coloratura rôles, with plenty of high notes in the upper register, but in no wise as difficult as the heavier coloratura rôles of grand opera. Such rôles as Marguerite in 'Faust,' Juliet in 'Romeo and Juliet,' and Lakmé in Delibes' opera, came later. And there was the greatest of the Mozart rôles—the Queen of the Night! At the Paris *Grand Opéra* the Italian tradition of presenting the Mozart coloratura parts is observed, and I do not think it can be improved upon. [ They should be sung with the purest *legato*, and studied slowly without any forcing of the voice. And no student should imagine that she can study them without a teacher, if she

wishes to sing them with all their beauty. Singing a Rossini rôle is quite a different matter from singing Mozart. Rossini's Italian *buffo* style, as in his 'Barbiere,' is never quite so pure, so honest, so noble as Mozart's. In singing Rossini one may be able to slur over this or that vocal difficulty and yet produce an effect; but in Mozart, whose music is as clear as crystal, every single tone must be perfect, and must be sung in perfect style.

### STUDYING MASSENET RÔLES WITH THE COMPOSER

"I have often studied operatic rôles with their composers, but I do not know of any who was more truly inspiring as a coach in his own works than Massenet. He was alive to every shade of meaning in a rôle, and sitting at the piano would make it clear to the singer with a patience, a kindness and a forgetfulness of self in the music which is hard to describe. I studied the rôles of Manon, Grisélidis—which I created in Bordeaux—and Thaïs with him. For Manon I remember



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I went to his studio, *Au Menestrel*, where his grand piano was heaped with printed music and manuscripts—I recall that some of the latter were written with violet ink—and as for Thaïs, originally created by Sybil Sanderson, and in which I sang the title rôle at the revival, I studied with him in his Paris apartments, where he had a wonderful music room. Wherever possible, the singer who is going to present a rôle by some living composer should try to make an opportunity of rehearsing it with him. There are delicacies of nuance and expression which he alone can give her; there are vocal effects which—though he may not be able to sing them for her—he can make so clear that they cannot fail to be grasped. Massenet, for instance, when he illustrated the part of the tenor, Des Grieux, in the Church Scene in ‘Manon’ at the piano, made the instrument sing his part with such dramatism, such conviction, that when, as Manon, I recalled our departed days of happiness, asked his forgiveness, and insisted that I loved him, in my singing, I was lifted to the

highest pitch of musical and emotional expression in order to do justice to the situation and Massenet's conception of it.

"He laid the greatest stress on perfection of detail. In the scene of the *Promenade de la Cours de la Reine*, where Manon, as Bretigny's mistress, is promenading under the trees, she sings the 'Fabliau'—a beautiful and difficult coloratura aria which is sung at the Paris *Opéra Comique*, but not at the Metropolitan. In this air Massenet, who paid the keenest attention to characterization, was especially anxious to show how Manon, with all her charm and all her appeal, was, after all, tainted with the vulgarity of the courtesan, that she could not altogether get away from her basic lack of conscience and morals. He wanted this to be brought out in a natural, fleeting way and not emphasized too strongly. So he said: 'Here, in these two measures—they are enough—where the music lends itself to the characterization, you must sing with a touch of the music hall, a suggestion of the coarse and common!'

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*f a Tempo* *(sans respirer) pp*

A. lors Ma-non chantait l'a-mour et la jeu-nesse! A. lors Ma-

*mf* *p* *pp*

*ppp ppp*

non chan - tait!

*ppp ppp*

After that, you must revert again to the better style.' And it was by such details that he revealed all sorts of delicacies of expression to the singer who coached with him. Thaïs is a delightful rôle, it seems ideally written for a young, fresh voice with a very high range, and such a voice is best able to produce the proper effect in the vocal laughter on the high C's and D's and E flats. Massenet was an excellent judge of singing and of individual singing quality. When I was rehearsing Manon he once said to me: 'You have the ideal singer's mouth; it opens naturally!' And in Grisélidis, which he really wrote for a

dramatic soprano, he told me not to try for dramatic effects, but to base my interpretation of the part on lyric singing, and concentrate all the brilliance and purity of my voice in the high register. There are a number of soprano rôles which may be sung in a lighter or a heavier vocal style, and the individual singer should always choose the manner in which she can make the most natural effect. *Aïda* is a rôle of this kind, and so is the rôle of Marguerite in 'Faust.' In the selfsame notes the dramatic soprano will get more effect out of the lower register, and the lyric soprano out of the higher one.

"I know that Massenet was supposed to pay court to every singer who ever studied his rôles with him. But he was always the gentleman, and I can say from my own experience that he did not persist in an attempt to *flirter* when he was not encouraged. Once, when I first was rehearsing *Manon* with him, I happened to drop my handkerchief. He immediately picked it up, pressed it to his face, and began paying me some delightfully extravagant compliments on the perfume I used. I merely took it from him and

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replied: 'Yes, *cher maître*, that is the perfume I use, and how did you say you wished this passage sung?' He realized at once that I was not interested in flirting with him, but in grasping my rôle, and after that he never tried to obtrude a more personal note in our musical work. Of course, in many cases, he was encouraged. I know of one famous singer who when she first came to him, and he did not seem to react to her personal charm, stopped singing and said: '*Mon cher maître*, I must be very homely!' 'What makes you say that?' asked Massenet. 'Well, you do not pay me the compliment of trying to flirt with me,' she answered.

### HINTS ON RECITAL SINGING AND OPERATIC SONG IN RECITAL

"The better a singer can sing opera, the better she will be able to sing in concert; though for both opera and concert, contrary to the idea some have, a couple of years of study are not enough to supply a real foundation. And the recital singer needs strength and temperament just as the opera singer does. If she is cold, if she cannot



## ALICE VERLET

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lose herself in the interpretation of an operatic rôle, she will also bore her audiences on the recital stage, for temperament and dramatic feeling are all the more needed there. Dresses and wigs will not 'put over' a rôle in opera, nor 'singing in costume' in a recital. A beautiful voice, properly handled, is a beautiful voice, and remains such, both on the dramatic and the concert stage. I cannot see why fine distinctions should be drawn. Yes, I believe the operatic aria has a legitimate place on the recital program. Too often, however, one or two hackneyed arias are sung. There is the 'Mad Scene' with flute obbligato from 'Lucia' for instance. It is a fine coloratura aria but done to death. Why not use some of the effective coloratura arias from Bellini's 'I Puritani,' Rossini's 'La Gazza Larda,' or both Rossini's and Verdi's 'Otello'? Some big arias are sure to fall flat. In the 'Mad Scene,' when used in recital, the flute is somewhat commonplace, and even the brilliant 'Jewel Song' from 'Faust' usually loses by being taken out of the operatic frame. Almost anything by Mozart, on the other hand, is appropriate. The Mas-

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senet 'Fabilau' from 'Manon,' which I have already mentioned, is, perhaps, an almost ideal concert number, and makes a fine big introductory aria for a recital program. Each singer should choose her opera songs for concert use herself, for no one knows as well as she does what is best suited for her voice. I think it a great mistake to sing the Puccini opera airs in concert, because 'La Bohème,' 'Madame Butterfly,' and other scores are so frequently given, and their melodies so often heard on the stage that audiences do not care for them on the concert platform.

"Concert singing in one sense strains the singer more than opera singing. In opera the singer has various opportunities to rest and conserve her strength during the performance; she is not singing all the time. The concert singer, however, must sing steadily through her program and cannot pause long between her groups. The real art in recital singing is to use the voice conservatively, in a proper choice of songs, so that the climaxing group and the climaxing songs reveal it at its best—but it is unfortunate that

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the critics leave after the second or third number as they do not hear the singers at their best.

### MAKING ONE'S OWN CADENZAS

“Even to-day, when the operatic coloratura aria is merely an incident of the recital program, the singer should be able, in a florid aria of the older type, to develop her own cadenza. When I was a girl I studied all those other subjects which do so much to round out the singer’s art. Every week I had lessons in walking on the stage, acting — Molière and Racine — and in gesture. I studied piano and harmony, with the result that I can sit down at any time and get a clear idea of a new song without calling upon an accompanist. And—as a rule—I have written my own cadenzas. In the Italian operatic aria by Bellini, Rossini or Donizetti, the cadenza is usually left to the individual singer’s discretion. The custom is to introduce it after the repetition of the first vocal theme. I know that when Patti sang ‘Una voce poco fa’ for Rossini, she did not take the trouble to even sing the first theme completely, but introduced the cadenza then and

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there, and Rossini said: 'Very lovely, but what aria did you sing. . . .?' Every really trained singer should be able to improvise or write her own cadenzas. Sometimes a distinguished composer writes one for a singer and such a one is usually worth treasuring. I have a wonderfully effective cadenza written in the modern style, through a series of keys, with the flute, for the 'Lucia' aria, which Paul Vidal wrote for me, and it is the original manuscript which I have transferred to my copy of the score. I value it highly. Reynaldo Hahn, by the way, has written melodies for recital use which are very intimate and appealing, if sung with the *voix blanche*, the soft, relaxed *mezza voce* tone. Paul Vidal, too, has written lovely songs for recital, though they demand a good deal of the artist. An ideal coloratura song for the recital stage, when a chorus is available, is Saint-Saëns' 'Le Rossignol' from his cantata 'La Nuit.'

### WHAT MAKES A GOOD SINGER

"I think that not one quality alone, but a number are required to make a good singer. The

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voice has to be there, no one can 'make' it. Then health, strength, temperament, love for singing, and—patience! American parents, it seems to me, and American students only too often lack this essential. Girls want to make a *début* at the Metropolitan after six months of study. I know that it cost me four years of strenuous work before I could venture to appear in the lighter rôles of the soprano repertory. And I believe in the national conservatory idea subventioned by the State, as it is carried out in France and other European countries—not that the really qualified private teacher should be discounted—where the student can follow systematic and complete courses in singing, and all the necessary subjects connected with singing, under the greatest masters of the art, native and foreign.”

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THE END











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